NATION

Bihar's Begusarai world's most polluted city: Report

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Sensex tanks 736 points, Nifty slides below 22,000

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Bumrah needs off-season with his bowling action: McGrath

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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In TN, PM tears into INDIA over 'Shakti'

He said INDIA, DMK are destroying Shakti

SALEM, 19 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday made yet another blistering attack on the multi-party INDIA bloc over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Shakti' remarks. He alleged the party and its allies including the DMK were out to 'destroy' it but asserted they will get destroyed.

Attacking Congress and its southern ally, the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu, he said they were "two sides of the coin" and levelled allegations of corruption and dynasty politics against them.

Rahul Gandhi's "fight against Shakti" remark had sparked a controversy on Monday and drew a strong retort from Modi who said every mother and daughter was a form of 'Shakti' for him and that he will sacrifice his life for their security.

As Modi seized upon Gandhi's remark made at the INDIA bloc rally in Mumbai on Sunday, the Congress leader clarified that he was not talking about any religious power but the 'Shakti' of unrighteousness, corruption and falsehood.

Narendra Modi waves at supporters as he arrives for a rally ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Salem, Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

"What does Shakti mean in Hinduism-- everybody in Tamil Nadu knows that," he said addressing a BJP rally here.

In Tamil Nadu, Shakti means the divine manifestation in the form of woman deities -- Kanchi Kamakshi Amman, Madurai Meenakshi Amman the "Shakti peet" and Samayapuram Mariamman, he said. "These are Shakti."

Further, in the Hindu faith, Shakti means, "matru shakti, naari shakti," he said, alluding to woman power.

Invoking national poet Subramania Bharathi, he said he had worshipped Mother India "in Shakti swaroop" (form of Shakti). He also worshipped the country's 'nari shakti,' Modi said.

Taking on DMK, he said, it was well-known how the party behaved with the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa when she was alive. "This is DMK's real face. They even oppose the women's reservation bill. Because of this, crimes against women in Tamil Nadu are rising. Vote against this anti-woman attitude of the DMK on 19 April," Modi said. —*PTI*

Congress manifesto to cover 5 'Nyays'

The manifesto will also cover 25 guarantees

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Congress' manifesto for Lok Sabha polls would focus on "Paanch NYAY" and "Pachees Guarantee", and the party on Tuesday resolved to take its promises to the people with a "ghar ghar guarantee" mantra.

The party's highest decision-making body Congress Working Committee (CWC), which met during the day, authorised Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to give the final approval to the manifesto and decide a date for its release.

Addressing a press conference after the CWC meeting, party leaders KC Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh said the CWC has prepared a roadmap for taking the party's guarantees to the grassroots.

Ramesh said the Congress will release not just a "ghoshna patra (manifesto)" but a "nyay patra" so that people see a bright future.

Ramesh said the aim is to take the guarantees under the "Panch Nyay" -- "Nari Nyay", "Shramik Nyay", "Kisaan Nyay", "Yuva Nyay" and "Hissedari Nyay" -- to every household with the aim "ghar ghar guarantee".

Mallikarjun Kharge with Rahul Gandhi and KC Venugopal during CWC meeting at AICC headquarters, in New Delhi, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Under the "Yuva Nyay", the party has promised "Bharti Bharosa" -- 30 lakh new central government jobs, according to a jobs calendar. Under the "Pehli Naukri Pakki", the Congress has promised a one-year paid apprenticeship for all educated youths at Rs 1 lakh a year or Rs 8,500 a month.

Under its "Yuva Roshni" guarantee, the party has promised a Rs 5,000-crore start-up fund for the youth.

As part of the "Nari Nyay", Congress has promised the "Mahalakshmi" guarantee of Rs 1 lakh a year for one woman in every poor family.

The party has also promised 50 per cent reservation for women in new central government jobs. It has also promised "Adhikar Maitri" in every village to ensure women get their legal rights. Under "Kisaan Nyay", Congress has promised a legal guarantee to minimum support price (MSP) for crops at the Swaminathan formula, and a standing loan waiver commission for farmers, if it comes to power. —*PTI*

RCB renamed to Royal Challengers Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Royal Challengers Bangalore officially changed their name to Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Tuesday, as confirmed during the franchise's Unbox event at M Chinnaswamy Stadium. RCB officially replaced 'Bangalore' in their team name with the City's official name, Bengaluru. The franchise confirmed the news on its social media handles, along with a new logo, ahead of the upcoming season of the tournament. RCB Unbox event, recognised the achievements of both the men's and women's teams —*ANI*

>>>More on Page 8

Sea recedes, exposing seabed near Alappuzha

ALAPPUZHA, 19 MARCH

A stretch of the coast near Alappuzha witnessed an unusual phenomenon on Tuesday, where the sea receded from its usual shoreline, leaving a portion of the seabed exposed. The sea receded approximately 50 metres along a half-kilometre stretch from Purakkad to Ayyankovil near Ambalappuzha, raising concerns among the fishing community. The affected area, now filled with sludge, has hindered their ability to embark on fishing ventures. Local MLA H Salam, along with other public representatives, visited the site to assess the situation. —*PTI*

DMK complains against use of kids in Modi roadshow

CHENNAI, 19 MARCH

The ruling DMK on Tuesday demanded that the Election Commission probe the use of school children by the BJP for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's roadshow in Coimbatore and also sought action against Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for delivering "hate speech". Separately, Coimbatore District Collector Kranthi Kumar Pati said the administration is inquiring into the incident of the use of school children during Modi's roadshow. —*PTI*

Don't seal shops over 60% Kannada signage rule: HC

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Karnataka High Court has restrained State government from taking any precipitative action against commercial establishments that fail to adhere to the rule that required 60 per cent of the signboard to be in Kannada, and said the matter required further consideration.

A single-judge bench of Justice M Nagaprasanna on Monday observed that Karnataka government's 60 per cent Kannada signage rule under the recently passed law is 'prima facie untenable'.

He even maintained that the matter would require further consideration and a statement of objection by the State.

High Court was hearing a petition filed by the Retailers' Association of India challenging the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development (Amendment) Act, 2024 which stipulates that 60 per cent of the signage or nameplates in the State should be in Kannada.

PHOTO: PTI

The decision was taken after the pro-Kannada organisations went on a rampage in 2023 and vandalised many shops, business establishments and hotels for allegedly not respecting the Kannada language. —*PTI*

UN ISSUES ALERT' AFTER RECORD HEAT IN 2023

GENEVA, 19 MARCH

The UN weather agency is sounding a "red alert" about global warming, citing record-smashing increases last year in greenhouse gases, land and water temperatures and melting of glaciers and sea ice, and warning that the world's efforts to reverse the trend have been inadequate.

The World Meteorological Organisation, in a "State of the Global Climate" report released Tuesday, ratcheted up concerns that a much-vaunted climate goal is increasingly in jeopardy: That the world can unite to limit planetary warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. In 2023, over 90 per cent of ocean waters experienced heat wave conditions at least once. —*PTI*

SHOBHA, BJP LEADERS DETAINED

Protest in Bengaluru after man attacked over Chalisa

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

City police detained Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje and BJP MLA Suresh Kumar along with a number of right-wing activists on Tuesday during a protest condemning the assault on a shop owner for allegedly playing 'Hanuman Chalisa' during 'Azaan' (Islamic call for prayer).

Right-wing activists gathered in Nagarathpet here and started chanting Hanuman Chalisa even as police tried to take the victim, Mukhesh, a mobile shop owner, into custody. MLA Kumar questioned police as to why they were taking the victim into their custody. When police did not budge and tried to take him away, Kumar came in front of a police vehicle and protested. Police took Kumar and Karandlaje, who also arrived at the protest site, into custody. Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya too visited the shop and announced the playing of Hanuman Chalisa everywhere in the City.

The Right-wing activists alleged that instead of real culprits, police have arrested those who did not attack Mukhesh.

Mukhesh said they have been targeted. "This is not Bengaluru. The atrocities are done here like once they were in Kashmir. I was at my shop playing Hanuman Chalisa. The attackers questioned me why I was playing this near a mosque and at the time of namaz at 6.30pm and attacked me."

In his complaint, Mukhesh said he owned a shop on Jumma Masjid Road. On Sunday evening, the accused barged inside the shop and attacked him for playing the speaker. The group threatened the 26-year-old for life and attacked him with weapons, as per the complaint.

People protest after a shopkeeper was assaulted for playing 'Hanuman Chalisa", at Nagarathpete, in Bengaluru on Tuesday; Below: Shobha Karandlaje takes part in the protest **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Police arrested Suleman, Shanavaz, Rohit, Dyanish and Taruna in connection with the incident. —*PTI*

SC refuses to stay CAA, to hear pleas

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Supreme Court on Tuesday asked Centre to respond within three weeks to applications seeking a stay on implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024 till the apex court disposes of the pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

The apex court, however, refused to stay the operation of the Rules that would give effect to CAA, as sought by a battery of senior advocates representing the petitioners.

Centre, on its part, told the bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud that CAA does not take away the citizenship of any person.

The bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, issued notice to the Centre on the 20 applications seeking a stay on the implementation of the Rules returnable within three weeks.

"We are not expressing any prima facie view. We have to hear the petitioners, we have to hear the other side," the bench observed and posted the matter for hearing on 9 April. —*PTI*

FOR BETTER BENGALURU

B'luru Central has not seen dvpt for 15 years: Mansoor Khan

NAHEED ATAULLA
BENGALURU, 19, MARCH

Mansoor Ali Khan, a politician, educationist, and community activist, faces a tough challenge in the Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha seat as he seeks to unseat BJP, which has held the constituency since 2009. Khan is the trustee of KK Educational and Charitable Trust, which was founded by his father, K Rahman Khan, former deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha. The trust has made significant contributions to education, including the establishment of Delhi Public School. Khan has played important roles in the Karnataka Congress and, as AICC secretary in-charge of Telangana, led the party to victory in 2023. In an interview with **Salar News**, Khan shares his thoughts on the upcoming election.

How does it feel to have finally secured the ticket for Bengaluru Central amidst tough competition
Bengaluru Central is a prestigious constituency and a lot of people would aspire to contest from here. I am thankful to Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, KC Venugopal, Randeep Singh Surjewala, Siddaramaiah and DK Shivakumar for reposing faith in me to fight from this constituency.

Why has Congress been finding it challenging to win Bengaluru Central seat, while BJP has been dominating it since 2009?

Mansoor Ali Khan **PHOTO: SALAR**

The seat is competitive, so we need to connect with voters. In the 2023 Assembly results, we received more votes than BJP. We're optimistic and believe we can win the seat this time.

Your political opponent, BJP candidate PC Mohan claims Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the factor rather than him to win the seat and describes himself as just a messenger. What would be your USP?
The development of my constituency is my top priority. I believe that 15 years is a long time to bring about significant changes. I think the people can vouch for the lack of development here. One common complaint is that the current MP is not seen. Improving infrastructure, especially Outer Ring Road-- which is the hub of IT activity, addressing issues such as flooding and the recent water crisis, and ensuring accountability for local leaders are all important to me. Even though the current MP, MLAs, and corporators have held their positions for 15 years, there have been no tangible results, and I want to change that by bringing about the necessary changes and improvements.

What are your priorities for Bengaluru Central, if voted to power??
My priorities are education, healthcare, traffic, and basic civic amenities. I believe these issues need immediate attention. My goal is to transform Bengaluru Central into a model Lok Sabha constituency as it is not only an important part of the City but also the IT hub and pride of India.

You are an educationist, politician and community activist. How do you combine all these into one?
It is important that good people come into politics with a vision. Politics, education and being a community activist are interlinked because all three are related to social service. Finally, all these three combined make the society and the person you are.

Congress has set a target of winning 20 of 28 Lok Sabha seats in the State. What should the party do to achieve this?
Congress government in Karnataka has started well. We are a pro-people government. You will see the five guarantees are working on the ground. When the guarantees are working and kicking on the ground, people will be able to see how the changes are happening.

—*Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Poll body seizes ₹1 crore from car in Mandya

MANDYA, 19 MARCH

Election Commission of India seized Rs 1 crore from a car near the Mandya border check post on Monday. The car was traveling from Bengaluru to KR Pete in Mandya. The officials found Rs 99.2 L while checking the car near the check post. It lacked the requisite documentation for transporting such a large amount of cash. The election staff, along with police personnel, confiscated both the money and the car. The vehicle's owner Girish, was questioned by election officials but failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for the unaccounted money. A case has been registered at the Maddur police station. Mandya's Election Officer will transfer the confiscated money to Income Tax Department. With the announcement of the Lok Sabha election date, the model code of conduct is now in effect, prompting heightened vigilance from law enforcement and election authorities at checkpoints. Vehicles passing through districta are subject to thorough inspection.

—Salar News

Cong will spilt after LS polls, says Bommai

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

There will be fractures in Congress just after Lok Sabha elections and Siddaramaiah-led State government will not last long due to internal squabbles, said former Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai. Bommai praised sitting MP Shivakumar Udasi for his developmental efforts and efficient execution of Central government initiatives in Gadag-Haveri constituency. The BJP leader said: "Narendra Modi will surely become Prime Minister for a third time. The overall response has been good in Gadag-Haveri Lok Sabha constituency." About reports that he was reluctant to contesting the election from Gadag-Haveri, Bommai said: "Such a question does not arise when the party's high command gives instructions." He affirmed his respect for opponents and vowed not to underestimate any contender.*—PTI*

Yaduveer, a representative of people: Simha

MYSURU, 19 MARCH

BJP MP Pratap Simha has once again voiced his support for Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, who is contesting Lok Sabha elections from Mysuru-Kodagu seat. Simha said in the absence of king after the Constitution came into place, Yaduveer has emerged as a representative of the people. Simmha highlighted Yaduveer's role as a public representative within BJP. Simmha applauded advancements such as the railway station's modernization and efforts to rename trains. Simmha said he is confident in Yaduveer's victory.

—Salar News

Dissidence erupts in BJP ahead of Lok Sabha polls

A few party leaders threaten to switch over to Congress

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

BJP's first list of 20 candidates for Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka has caused dissidence among leaders in the State with a few claiming that they would switch over to Congress.

Former Deputy Chief Minister KS Eshwarappa, a staunch RSS supporter, has revolted against the party.

Eshwarappa went all out against the former chief minister and BJP parliamentary board member BS Yediyurappa after his son K E Kantesh could not make it to the list of candidates announced by the high command a week ago.

Karnataka has 28 Lok Sabha seats. BJP leader wanted a

BJP's 1st list contains 20 candidates for LS polls. *PHOTO: PTI*

ticket for his son from the Haveri Lok Sabha seat, but the party fielded the sitting MLA and former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai from there.

Upset over the development, Eshwarappa announced that he would contest the elections from Shivamogga against Yediyurappa's elder son BY Vijayendra as a mark of protest against dynastic politics in Karnataka'.

In an interview to PTI, Eshwarappa alleged that BJP is in bad shape in Karnataka.

"People and the workers are in favour of the BJP but the system here is bad. What is our Narendra Modi ji saying? Congress is in the hands of one family. Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi the central Congress is being controlled by one family. Same situation in Karnataka. Karnataka's BJP is in control of one family. We have to protest this," the 75-year-old leader said.

He even charged that those standing in favour of Hindutva are being sidelined, be it CT Ravi, Pratap Simha, Basanagouda Patil Yatnal or Sadananda Gowda.

"Under any circumstances, I will have to fight the election, which I will do," Eshwarappa said.

In Koppal, two-time BJP MLA Karadi Sanganna is upset over being denied a ticket. The party has decided to field Basavaraj Kyavator.

An angry Sanganna said he too is in touch with Congress leaders "but no decision has been taken yet".

BJP has fielded V Somanna from Tumakuru, which has enraged former Karnataka Minister JC Madhuswamy, who had expressed his displeasure. He, however, noted that "Congress is not a safe zone". *—PTI*

LOK SABHA POLLS

Seat-sharing with JD(S) will be resolved amicably: Vijayendra

BJP State President BY Vijayendra

PHOTO: PTI

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

BJP State President BY Vijayendra on Tuesday said JD(S)' unhappiness over the seat sharing issue for the Lok Sabha polls, would be resolved amicably.

He said BJP and JD(S) leadership are discussing "everything and there will be a happy ending."

"Last night I had a telephonic discussion with our national leaders, after that I spoke to former prime minister HD Deve Gowda over phone, and have also shared information with HD Kumaraswamy this morning," Vijayendra said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said the national leadership will make a decision that is satisfactory to JD(S).

Indicating that JD(S) is unhappy over the seat sharing issue, its state President HD Kumaraswamy on Monday said he has faith that the regional party will get three to four seats, amid reports that the saffron party may cede it only two.

He also said his party leaders have asked him to communicate to BJP leadership about the need to treat the JD(S) "respectfully" and make them understand its strength in at least 18 Lok Sabha segments.

On whether JD(S) will contest in three seats, Vijayendra said the issue is still under discussion.

> **BJP and JD(S) leadership are discussing everything and there will be a happy ending. National leadership will make a decision that is satisfactory to JD(S)**
>
> -BY Vijayendra, BJP State President

JD(S) joined the NDA last September and has forged an electoral alliance with the BJP.

The regional party is expected to contest in three seats -- Mandya, Hassan and Kolar -- and as per agreement between parties, noted cardiac surgeon, and Deve Gowda's son-in-law Dr CN Manjunath has been fielded from Bengaluru Rural on a BJP ticket.

However, according to recent reports, BJP is not ready to cede Kolar seat to JD(S), which has irked the regional outfit.

On Congress sending feelers to BJP leader and former chief minister DV Sadananda Gowda, Vijayendra said, he is confident that everything will be fine and there is no question of him crossing over and he will remain in BJP. *—PTI*

CONGRESS GIVING COOKERS TO LURE VOTERS, SAYS HDK

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Charging the Congress with distributing cookers to lure voters in Bangalore Rural Lok Sabha segment, JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Tuesday demanded deployment of paramilitary forces in the constituency to ensure fair election.

Targeting Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and his brother DK Suresh, who is the incumbent MP and Congress candidate from the seat, he urged the Election Commission to remove Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police and CEO (Zilla Panchayat) in the constituency, accusing them of lacking the "guts" to conduct fair election.

He alleged that already one round of distribution of allurements like cookers and sarees among other things had been completed. "In this election in Bangalore Rural, there is misuse of power on one side, on the other side there is muscle power and money power. They (Congress) want to win the election with the help of officials," the State JD(S) President said.

He asked: "If Congress had really worked for the poor and if they had confidence that the people have liked their programmes in the last one year, why did they have to conduct an election like this?" *—PTI*

DKS FLAYS JD(S) OVER FIELDING MANJUNATH

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress president DK Shivakumar hit out at JD(S) for fielding Dr CN Manjunath, the son-in-law of JD(S) Supremo HD Deve Gowda, on a BJP ticket from Bengaluru Rural. He said it is 'first suicide attempt' of the regional party.

Manjunath, is a cardiologist and is pitied against Congress' DK Suresh, who is Shivakumar's brother and sitting MP from the constituency.

"Congress foresaw such a situation arising with the JD(S) and the BJP alliance," he said over JD(S) State president H D Kumaraswamy expressing dissatisfaction over seat-sharing with BJP in Karnataka.

The decision to field Manjunath under the BJP symbol was part of a seat-sharing agreement between BJP and JD(S). *—Salar News*

VOTER TURNOUT

EC uses apps, QR codes, social media influencers

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Election Commission (EC) said it is leveraging technology to increase voter turnout in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Some of the initiatives include encouraging people to use different apps and putting QR codes on voter slips to help locate polling booths.

Voter Helpline, 'Know Your Candidate' and updating details about number of voters in queue and kind of parking facilities available at polling booths and an elaborate booth election management plan are among the other measures being taken.

EC is also collaborating with social media influencers to encourage people to cast their ballot.Celebrities such as Rahul Dravid, Jnanpith awardee Chandrashekhara Kambar and Paralympian Girish Gowda are the State election icons.

Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Meena said out of the 58,834 polling booths, EC has identified 5,000 polling booths especially those in the urban and Kalyana Karnataka, which have seen very low voting percentage.

Of 58,834 polling booths, 5,000 have low voting percentage. *PHOTO: PTI*

Meena said they have also prepared an elaborate booth management plan to reach out to those people. "In urban constituencies, need for better facilities for polling was seen, in Kalyana Karnataka region, migration was a major reason for low voter turnout. So, we actually convinced family members to call those outside the State and encouraged them to come to their hometowns just to cast votes," he said.

EC is also keen on promoting features of 'Chunavana' mobile application through which the Booth Level Officers would update details about the number of people in queue at their respective polling booths. *—PTI*

Polls: Weapon holders told to deposit arms

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Bengaluru City Police has mandated all licence holders of firearms to the deposit their weapons to their respective police stations ahead of upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

There are certain categories that are exempt from depositing their weapons such as central and state government departments, public and private security agencies with valid licenses, registered class-i officers of central and state governments, members of the national rifle association actively participating in sporting events, and Kodava Samaj, a community with legal rights to bear arms.

Those with special circumstances can apply for exemption at their division's Deputy Commissioner of Police office by 25 March, 2024. *—Salar News*

CM hits out at Modi, calls him a 'weak PM'

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday called out Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his comments during his Shivamogga rally. "There are no super or no shadow CMs in the Congress party; there is only one CM, that is a "Strong CM", I am not a "Weak PM" like you," Siddaramaiah said.

Modi had said in the Karnataka government, there is one 'shadow' CM who wants to replace the current CM and also there is another 'collection' CM in New Delhi.

Taking it to X, Siddaramaiah said, "Modi, you describe yourself as 56-inch chest, your fans hail you as Vishwaguru. But you are showing yourself as a "Weak PM" again and again."

About the time senior BJP leader BS Yediyurappa rebelled against the party and formed his political party, Siddaramaiah said, "Yediyurappa once rebelled against your leadership and abused you. By falling at the feet of such people and bringing them back to the party and marching, didn't you show yourself as a weak PM?"

After the Lok Sabha tickets were announced by BJP, Siddaramaiah said the BJP leaders are fighting for the tickets on the streets and some are contacting them. *—Salar News*

DV Sadananda Gowda *PHOTO: PTI*

Will reveal my political move today: Sadananda

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Confirming that Congress has sent him feelers, sulking former chief minister and BJP MP DV Sadananda Gowda on Tuesday said saffron party leaders have also reached out to him and that he will take a decision at an appropriate time.

The 71-year-old former Union Minister, who is upset over being denied the ticket to contest from Bangalore North again, said he has planned to call a press meet tomorrow (on Wednesday) to "share everything." "Congress people have asked me, also BJP, what decision has to be taken, I will decide at the appropriate time," Gowda said.

Asked whether BJP high command has contacted him, he said he will share everything tomorrow, "or else there will be nothing to say tomorrow." Gowda, who had served as Karnataka BJP president in the past, on Monday said he will share his "inner feelings" soon.

BJP shifted Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Shobha Karandlaje, who is currently representing Udupi-Chikkamagaluru Lok Sabha segment, to contest from Bangalore North.

Meanwhile, Gowda, who is a Vokkaliga, one of the dominant communities in the state, met leaders of 'Rajya Vokkaligara Sangha' on Tuesday. 'Rajya Vokkaligara Sangha' President D Hanumanthaiah said the community stands behind Gowda, who has done good work in the government and the party.

"Why is the ticket not given to him (Gowda)? Whichever the party may be, if they give less tickets to the community or neglect the community, we will fight," he said, pointing out to community leaders like DK Shivakumar in the Congress not being made the Chief Minister. *—PTI*

'No trust deficit with BJP on seat-sharing'

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

A day after indicating unhappiness over the seat sharing issue with BJP, JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Tuesday said it did not mean that there is a trust deficit between the two parties.

He asserted that there is no confusion in the ties between BJP and JD(S), as he expressed hope that the issue over giving Kolar seat to the regional party "will be clear".

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "Till this moment they have not given any clarity regarding the specified number of seats for us to contest."

HD Kumaraswamy *PHOTO: PTI*

Further stating that Union Home Minister Amit Shah during his several meetings with him, after the alliance, has always treated JD(S)' request with respect, Kumaraswamy said, his reaction before the media on Monday did not mean that there is a trust deficit between the two parties.

Stating that there are no issues over the Kolar seat, the JD(S) State Chief indicated that his party will field a candidate in that constituency as well, along with Mandya and Hassan. He said he was going to Chennai for medical treatment; once he is back the party's candidates will be announced. *—PTI*

GELATIN STICKS WITH DETONATORS, EXPLOSIVES RECOVERED NEAR SCHOOL

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Authorities in Bengaluru are on high alert after police seized explosive materials from a vacant land near a private school on Tuesday. Items such as gelatine sticks and detonators were found and confiscated from a tractor parked on the empty site adjacent to the school. Preliminary investigations indicate that these materials are commonly used for quarrying and construction purposes, raising questions about their presence in such proximity to a school. Bellandur Police responded to the tip-off and secured the area. *—Salar News*

DOUBLE WHAMMY

Vegetable prices shoot up in City due to water shortage

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

Bengalureans who are struggling due to the water crisis have to now battle the rise in vegetable prices as well.

"There is a substantial decline in the arrival of fresh vegetables due to water scarcity across the State," Prakash Mirji, the managing director of HOPCOMS (Horticultural Producers' Co-operative Marketing Society) told Salar News. "This limited supply, coupled with an unwavering demand, has inevitably pushed prices upwards."

Farmers are finding it tough to cultivate in this climate. "Cultivating water-intensive vegetables like tomatoes and leafy greens has become increasingly difficult. Many farmers are forced to resort to expensive alternatives like borewell water, inflating their production costs."

There is a decline in the arrival of fresh vegetables due to water scarcity across the State *PHOTO: PTI*

The price hike affects the consumers as well. Anupama K, a resident of Jayanagar told Salar News "It's impacting our grocery budget. We are having to cut back on certain vegetables or find cheaper alternatives."

Shweta S, another customer from Banashankari, said: "We're buying smaller quantities and focusing on seasonal vegetables that might be slightly cheaper."

This hike in price has not only affected the household but also the hoteliers. PC Rao, President of the Hotels Association of Bengaluru, told Salar News "Right now, we have not changed the price of any of the food in restaurants. But if vegetable prices continue to rise, we might have to consider raising food prices as well."

—Salar News

Price increase for some vegetables in wholesale markets

Vegetable	Price on 14 March (per KG)	Vegetable price on 19 March (per KG)
Beans	₹51	₹54
Cauliflower	₹27	₹28
Brinjal	₹21	₹23
Green chillies	₹20	₹35
Potato	₹27	₹33
Ladies finger	₹39	₹42
Pumpkin	₹19	₹23

Kejriwal moves HC against summons in PMLA case

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday moved the Delhi High Court challenging the summons issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate in an excise policy-linked money laundering case. The petition of the AAP national convenor, who has been asked to appear before the agency on 21 March, is listed for hearing on Wednesday before a bench of Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Manoj Jain. He has moved the court against the latest summons, the ninth issued by the ED asking him to appearing before it for questioning under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. Kejriwal has repeatedly refused to appear in response to these summonses, calling them illegal. The case pertains to alleged corruption in formulating and executing the city government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped.—*PTI*

Cong leader Rohan Gupta withdraws nomination

AHMEDABAD, 19 MARCH

Congress leader Rohan Gupta on Monday announced his decision to withdraw his candidature from Ahmedabad East Lok Sabha seat owing to his father's "serious medical condition." "Due to a serious medical condition, my father has been admitted in hospital and I am withdrawing my candidature for Ahmedabad east parliament seat as Congress Candidate. I will extend complete support to the new candidate nominated by the party," Gupta said in a post on 'X'. Congress national spokesperson also shared his letter stating the withdrawal of his candidature along with his post. Gupta was among the 43 candidates announced by the Congress on 12 March, which included seven candidates from Gujarat. BJP Hasmukh Patel is currently the sitting MP from Ahmedabad East. —*ANI*

Former Indian-US envoy Taranjit Singh joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Former Indian ambassador to United States Taranjit Singh Sandhu joined BJP on Tuesday, amid a possibility that he may be fielded in the Lok Sabha polls from Amritsar in Punjab. He joined the party in the presence of its general secretaries Tarun Chugh and Vinod Tawde, who highlighted Sandhu's distinguished family lineage. His father Bishan Singh Samundri was a well-known educationist and founding vice-chancellor of the Guru Nanak Dev University. Joining BJP, Sandhu spoke about the growth of the India-US relationship and said development has been its focus area in a host of fields such as the semiconductor industry. The former IFS officer thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and party president JP Nadda for his political innings. Tawde said the presence of someone like Sandhu with a successful diplomatic background in the BJP will strengthen the party.—*PTI*

CPI is playing BJP's game, says Tharoor

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor hit out at CPI on Tuesday, saying that it is ironic that Left party which complains about Rahul Gandhi's candidature in Wayanad is "playing BJP's game" in Thiruvananthapuram. Congress candidate from Thiruvananthapuram said the only effect of CPI's campaign against him in the constituency is to divide the anti-BJP vote, "and they preach alliance dharma in Wayanad". Last week, CPI general secretary D Raja had said that fielding Gandhi from Kerala's Wayanad is Congress's prerogative but the public opinion is that a leader of his stature should have contested a seat where he could directly challenge the BJP whose ideology he is fighting. —*PTI*

Pashupati Paras resigns from Cabinet

He accused BJP of injustice but thanked Modi

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Union Minister Pashupati Kumar Paras resigned on Tuesday as he accused BJP of doing "injustice" with his Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party by excluding it from the seat-sharing deal with allies for the Lok Sabha polls in Bihar.

Paras's announcement came at a press conference a day after BJP-led NDA announced its seat-sharing pact and gave five seats to the Chirag Paswan-led LJP (Ram Vilas), ignoring his faction's claims.

Paras made brief remarks at the press conference about his resignation and did not elaborate on his future plans.

The only ally in the Union Cabinet headed by Modi, he called the Prime Minister a big leader.

RLJP President said he was thankful to Modi before expressing his displeasure over the treatment meted out to him. Paras said he had served National Democratic Alliance with honesty and loyalty but received injustice.

"Injustice has been meted out to my party and especially me," he said.

His party's spokesperson Shravan Agarwal said its leaders will meet soon to decide its next course of action but made it clear that Paras will contest elections. Though Paras enjoyed the support of five of the six Lok Sabha MPs of LJP until sometime back, none of them accompanied him at the press conference.

Some of them, sources said, are on a hunt for striking deals with other parties, including the one headed by his estranged nephew Chirag Paswan, to contest the upcoming polls. Paras may explore the possibility of joining hands with the Opposition alliance led by Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar to fight against his nephew in the Hajipur seat.

He represents Hajipur in the outgoing Lok Sabha and Paswan has also indicated that he will be contesting from the seat, considered a pocket borough of his late father Ram Vilas Paswan. —*PTI*

Union Minister and Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party chief Pashupati Kumar Paras addresses a press conferences *PHOTO: PTI*

SEAT-SHARING DEAL

PMK founder S Ramadoss with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting in Salem on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP allots 10 LS seats for PMK in TN

THAILAPURAM, 19 MARCH

BJP on Tuesday clinched a seat-sharing deal with S Ramadoss-headed Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) in Tamil Nadu for the 19 April Lok Sabha polls, allotting 10 seats to the regional party.

After Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai and Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) President Anbumani Ramadoss signed a seat-sharing agreement in Thailapuram, K Annamalai said that it is a strong alliance. "It is a strong alliance. The political scenario has changed due to the decision taken by the PMK to align with the BJP-led NDA. We came to Thailapuram from Coimbatore overnight. Both leaders Ramadoss and Anbumani Ramadoss will be taking part in the public meeting in Selam today where Prime Minister Modi will deliver his speech." said Tamil Nadu BJP Chief K Annamalai.

Meanwhile, PMK President Anbumani Ramadoss said that Modi will definitely become the Prime Minister for the third time in India and take India to greater heights.

"For the last ten years PMK has been part of the NDA in Delhi. Today, PMK has decided to join the NDA in Tamil Nadu and an agreement was signed. We are happy that we have joined the NDA in Tamil Nadu for a change." said PMK President Anbumani Ramadoss. PMK contested 23 seats in the AIADMK alliance in the 2021 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election and won five seats by securing 4.04 per cent. —*PTI/ANI*

JMM LEGISLATOR SITA SOREN QUITS PARTY

RANCHI, 19 MARCH

In a blow to Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Jama legislator Sita Soren tendered her resignation from the party on Tuesday, citing allegations of being side-lined along with her family.

In her resignation letter addressed to the party's supremo and her father-in-law, Shibu Soren, Sita expressed her grievances, stating that following the demise of her husband, Durga Soren, the party failed to provide adequate support to her and her family. Sita lamented and said she was feeling neglected and reluctantly decided to tender her resignation from the primary membership of the party. Sita voiced her disappointment, indicating a deviation from the party's core values by accommodating people whose principles do not align with its ethos. Party spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharyya said the official letter was yet to reach him. "Since the demise of my late husband Durga Soren, who was a leading warrior of the Jharkhand movement and a great revolutionary, me and my family have been victims of continuous neglect. We have been isolated by the party and family members, which has been extremely painful for me," she said. —*PTI*

Sita Soren *PHOTO: PTI*

NO PLACE FOR ANIL VIJ

Haryana cabinet expanded with eight new ministers

CHANDIGARH, 19 MARCH

The Nayab Singh Saini government in Haryana carried out its first cabinet expansion on Tuesday by inducting eight party MLAs as ministers.

Senior BJP leader and former home minister Anil Vij did not find a place in the Saini-led cabinet.

Saini and five ministers took oath last week. Haryana can have a maximum of 14 ministers, including the Chief Minister. Governor Bandaru Dattatreya administered the oath of office and secrecy to the new ministers at the Raj Bhavan here. BJP MLA from Hisar Kamal Gupta was the first one to be administered oath as cabinet minister.

Thereafter, Badkhal MLA Seema Trikha, Panipat Rural MLA Mahipal Dhanda, Ambala City MLA Aseem Goel, Nangal Chaudhary MLA Abhe Singh Yadav, Thanesar MLA Subhash Sudha, Bawani Khera MLA Bishamber Singh Balmiki, and Sohna MLA Sanjay Singh were sworn in as ministers of state (independent charge).

Former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar was also present at the swearing-in ceremony.

In a surprise move last week, the BJP replaced Manohar Lal Khattar with OBC leader Saini as Haryana's chief minister in a swift switch in the state, just weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Saini, who is the party's state unit president, was sworn in as chief minister a week ago along with five ministers hours after the resignation of Khattar.

On the day of swearing-in of Saini, Khattar, when asked whether Vij's name was there in the race for the post of a Deputy Chief Minister, had said, "Ministers had to take oath today and his (Vij's) name was on that (list). But he could not come."

Vij has apparently been upset with the party not keeping him in the loop when they decided to make Saini the Chief Minister by removing Khattar. PTI

Anil Vij *PHOTO: PTI*

- Governor Bandaru Dattatreya administered the oath of office and secrecy to the new ministers at the Raj Bhavan here

Sharad Pawar faction of NCP gets symbol

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed the Sharad Pawar faction to use 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' as its name for the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in the country.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan also permitted the NCP bloc led by the veteran politician to use as its symbol 'man blowing turha' (a traditional trumpet also known as tutari).

The bench passed the order on a plea by the Sharad Pawar group seeking to restrain the Ajit Pawar faction from using the 'clock' symbol for the polls, as allotted by Election Commission, on the ground that it is disrupting the level playing field.

NCP, founded by Sharad Pawar, had a 'clock' as its election symbol before its split. The symbol is now with Ajit Pawar faction.

The bench directed EC and State Election Commission (SEC) to recognise the 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' and its symbol 'man blowing turha'.

It also asked the EC to not allot the 'man-blowing turha' symbol to any other party or an independent candidate.

It asked the Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar-led faction to issue a public notice in newspapers in English, Hindi and Marathi saying that the 'clock' symbol is sub-judice and its use is subject to adjudication.

The bench said Ajit Pawar faction should make similar declarations in all election-related audio-visual advertisements and publicity material like banners and posters.

—*PTI*

BRS's K Kavitha withdraws 2023 plea against ED

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

BRS leader K Kavitha on Tuesday withdrew from Supreme Court her petition challenging summons by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED).

Kavitha's lawyer submitted before a bench led by Justice Bela M Trivedi that they are withdrawing her petition challenging ED summons.

However Kavitha on Monday moved SC challenging her arrest which is pending before the top court. Kavitha in her petition has also challenged her remand as well and said the remand order doesn't adhere to Article 141 which states that the law declared by the Supreme Court shall be binding on all courts within the territory of India. Kavitha in her plea also challenged section 19 (1) of the PMLA Act.

Earlier, the Enforcement Directorate claimed on Monday that Kavitha allegedly conspired with the top leaders of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia to get favours in the Delhi Excise policy formulation and implementation, and she was involved in paying Rs 100 crore to the AAP leaders in exchange for these favours

ED's claims came three days after it arrested Kavitha, MLC of Telangana Legislative Council, in the alleged case of Delhi Liquor Policy Scam.

ED has filed one prosecution complaint and five supplementary complaints in the case so far. "Further, out of proceeds of crime generated, assets worth Rs 128.79 crore have been traced so far and have been attached vide Provisional Attachment Orders dated 24 January, 2023 and 3 July, 2023. Both the attachment orders have been confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority. —*ANI*

Raj Thackeray meets Shah amid speculations of joining NDA

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in New Delhi in the presence of BJP National General Secretary Vinod Tawde. Thackeray met Vinod Tawde at a private hotel in the national capital.

Speculations are rife that MNS may become part of BJP-led NDA alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

BJP, Ajit Pawar-led NCP, and Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde are part of the ruling alliance in Maharashtra. BJP has often attacked its political rivals for practising dynastic politics. Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi is facing trouble finalising its seat-sharing arrangement. The three principle parties the Congres, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (S Pawar) are yet to finalise the seat-sharing arrangement. MVA constituent Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief Prakash Ambedkar has made his displeasure public alleging that the UBT sena and NCP (S Pawar) are not hearing out the VBA and its demands.

Maharashtra will vote in five phases for 48 constituencies in the upcoming general elections. Vote counting will take place on 4 June. Lok sabha Elections 2024 would be held in seven phases starting on 19 April. The results will be declared on 4 June. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won 23 out of 25 contested seats, while the undivided Shiv Sena secured 18 out of 23 seats. —*ANI*

MNS Chief Raj Thackeray and Union Home Minister Amit Shah *PHOTO: ANI*

Modi using govt funds for campaigning: TMC

KOLKATA, 19 MARCH

Trinamool Congress has complained to Election Commission alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is the BJP candidate from Varanasi, has violated the model code of conduct by using central government funds for campaigning.

In a letter addressed to Chief election commissioner on Monday, TMC Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien said a message by PM highlighting his government's programmes reached the electorate on 16 March, after the model code of conduct came into force.

Modi has purportedly written the message in the form of a letter to the voters on 15 March, TMC leader claimed.

He urged "EC to ensure that appropriate directions are issued to BJP and its candidate Modi to withhold from future campaigns at the cost of public exchequer, to withdraw the letter".

O'Brien said that the cost of sending the Prime Minister's letter to the electorate should also be included in the accounts of BJP and Modi against the head "election expenditure".

BJP Rajya Sabha MP and party spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said, "TMC leaders have no place in the hearts of people and that will be clear after the polls." PTI

LOK SABHA POLLS: RISE IN NUMBER OF CANDIDATES LOSING SECURITY DEPOSIT

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Over 71,000 candidates have lost their security deposit since the first Lok Sabha polls in 1951 for failing to secure a minimum of one-sixth of the total valid votes polled in their respective constituencies, according to an analysis of Election Commission data.

In the 2019 elections, a staggering 86 per cent of candidates suffered this fate.

Election Commission regulations stipulate that candidates failing to secure a minimum of one-sixth of the total valid votes polled would have their deposits redirected to the treasury.

In the 2019 elections, among prominent political parties,BSP forfeited deposits on the highest number of seats, with 345 out of its 383 candidates losing their deposits, followed by Congress with 148 out of its 421 candidates losing deposits.

In BJP, 51 out of its 69 candidates lost deposits and in the CPI, 41 out of its 49 candidates forfeited their deposits, according to official records.

The pinnacle of this trend was reached during the 11th Lok Sabha polls in 1996 when 91 per cent, or 12,688 out of 13,952 candidates, lost their deposits.

Lok Sabha polls will be held in seven phases beginning 19 April and the counting of votes will take place on 4 June for the world's biggest election exercise in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi will bid for a third consecutive term. —*PTI*

INDIA BLOC WILL GET MAJORITY

Modi's 400 plus claim 'hollow': Baghel

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Terming Prime Minister Narendra Modi's '400 paar' claim as "hollow", senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel on Tuesday said BJP's Ram temple pitch "would not make much of a difference" in the Lok Sabha polls and exuded confidence that INDIA bloc will get a clear majority to form the next government.

He expressed confidence that INDIA alliance will get a majority to form the government at the Centre, while Congress would be victorious in more than half of the 11 Lok Sabha seats in Chhattisgarh.

Asked about whether the INDIA bloc was still strong enough to take on BJP despite JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar switching over to NDA and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee deciding to go solo, Baghel said, "Our natural alliance partners are with us, in fact, our alliance has expanded with the likes of Uddhav Thackeray, Prakash Ambedkar along with several small parties joining us," he said.

Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel expressed confidence that INDIA alliance will get a majority to form the government at the Centre *PHOTO:PTI*

"So our alliance is strong, in fact, there are tensions in the National Democratic Alliance camp. You can see in Haryana, there is push and pull between uncle and nephew in Bihar (Chirag Paswan and Pashupati Paras), and in Uttar Pradesh also (Om Prakash) Rajbhar and Apna Dal factions are upset with seat distribution. So we don't see anyone going with them and more people are leaving their alliance," he added. Baghel also raised the issue of Supreme Court verdict in the electoral bonds case and hit out at Prime Minister.

Baghel said the electoral bonds issue would become the rallying point for the Opposition parties. PTI

Girl abducted from Kota hostel, dad gets ransom call

KOTA, 19 MARCH

A 21-year-old woman from Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri has been allegedly abducted from here with her father claiming that he has received a Rs 30-lakh ransom demand. However, the Kota police are yet to confirm if she was abducted from Kota. The woman's father, in a police complaint, stated that he had taken his daughter to Kota in August last year for exam coaching and she was living in a hostel under the Vigyan Nagar police station area. Based on the complaint, the police lodged a case of abduction under the Indian Penal Code on Monday night and started an investigation into the matter, the police official said. However, during investigation, police did not find any record of the woman getting admission to the institute, he said. *—PTI*

4 Naxalites killed in encounter with cops in M'rashtra

GADCHIROLI, 19 MARCH

Four Naxalites, carrying a collective bounty of Rs 36 lakh, were killed in an encounter with police in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district on Tuesday, a senior official said. The police received information on Monday afternoon that some Naxalites had entered Gadchiroli from neighbouring Telangana by crossing the Pranhita river with an aim to carry out subversive activities amid the model code of conduct in place for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Superintendent of Police Neelotpal said. While one of the C-60 unit teams was conducting a search on Tuesday morning in the Kolamarka mountains near Repanpalli, Naxalites fired at them indiscriminately to which the security personnel retaliated, the official said. *—PTI*

Opium racket busted in Punjab, one arrested

FAZILKA, 19 MARCH

The Border Security Force (BSF) and Punjab police busted a racket of illegal opium cultivation in Fazilka district on Monday and arrested one person. According to the officials, approximately 14.470 kilogrammes of opium plants were uprooted and seized by the police.During the joint operation, opium poppy cultivation along with coriander was discovered in an agricultural field near Chak Khewa Dhani Bachan. Earlier, on Monday, the Border Security Force (BSF) recovered a packet of suspected heroin, about 3.306 kilogrammes, in Punjab's Tarn Taran district. During the operation, vigilant troops successfully recovered a suspicious black-coloured bag near the Dargah of Bodal Saha Peer Baba, near Mehdipur village in the Tarn Taran district. *—PTI*

Rains, storms to lash parts of Andhra: IMD

AMARAVATI, 19 MARCH

The India Meteorological Department has predicted thunderstorms accompanied by lightning in parts of Andhra Pradesh for two days from Tuesday. Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning in isolated places will occur over North Coastal Andhra Pradesh (NCAP) and Yanam today, it said in a release. "Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning are likely at isolated places over NCAP, Yanam and South Coastal Andhra Pradesh (SCAP)," said the department forecasting weather for Wednesday. Besides rainfall, it has predicted hot and humid weather at isolated places in the southern Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh. According to the IMD, a trough and wind discontinuity is running from south Tamil Nadu to West Vidarbha from south Karnataka. *—PTI*

Bihar's Begusarai world's most polluted city: Report

Report says Delhi worst capital in terms of air quality

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Bihar's Begusarai emerged as the world's most polluted metropolitan area while Delhi was identified as the capital city with the poorest air quality, according to a new report.

With an average annual PM2.5 concentration of 54.4 micrograms per cubic metre, India had the third worst air quality out of 134 countries in 2023 after Bangladesh (79.9 micrograms per cubic metre) and Pakistan (73.7 micrograms per cubic metre), according to the World Air Quality Report 2023 by Swiss organisation IQAir.

In 2022, India was ranked as the eighth most polluted country with an average PM2.5 concentration of 53.3 micrograms per cubic metre.

Begusarai stood out as the most polluted metropolitan area globally with an average PM2.5 concentration of 118.9 micrograms per cubic metre. Delhi's PM2.5 levels worsened from 89.1 micrograms per cubic metre in 2022 to 92.7 micrograms per cubic metre in 2023.

In 2022, India was ranked as the eighth most polluted country with an average PM2.5 concentration of 53.3 micrograms per cubic metre *PHOTO: PTI*

The national capital was ranked the most polluted capital city in the world four times on the trot starting 2018.

It is estimated that 1.36 billion people in India experience PM2.5 concentrations exceeding the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended annual guideline level of five micrograms per cubic metre, the report said.

Also, 1.33 billion people, 96 per cent of the Indian population, experience PM2.5 levels more than seven times the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline. This trend is reflected in city-level data, with more than 66 per cent of the country's cities reporting annual averages greater than 35 micrograms per cubic metre.IQAir said the data utilised to create this report was aggregated from the global distribution of more than 30,000 regulatory air quality monitoring stations and low-cost air quality sensors operated by research institutions, governmental bodies, universities and educational facilities, non-profit non-governmental organisations, private companies and citizen scientists.

The 2022 World Air Quality Report included data from 7,323 locations in 131 countries, regions and territories. In 2023, those numbers have grown to include 7,812 locations in 134 countries, regions and territories.Causing an estimated one in every nine deaths worldwide, air pollution is the greatest environmental threat to human health. *—PTI*

NO RESPONSE TO NOTICE

Patanjali ads: Supreme court summons Ramdev

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed yoga guru Ramdev and Managing Director of Patanjali Ayurved Acharya Balkrishna to appear before it after taking exception to the company's failure to respond to notice issued in the contempt proceedings relating to advertisements of the firm's products and their medicinal efficacy.

The apex court said it deemed appropriate to issue a show cause notice to Ramdev as the advertisements issued by Patanjali, which were in the teeth of the undertaking given to the court on November 21, 2023, reflect an endorsement by him.

A bench of justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah noted that Patanjali Ayurved, a company co-founded by Ramdev and dealing in herbal products, and Balkrishna have not filed replies to the notices issued earlier to show cause why contempt proceedings be not initiated against them for prima facie violating the undertaking given to the court."Further, having gone through the advertisements issued by respondent 5 (Patanjali Ayurved) in the teeth of the undertaking given to this court on 21 November, 2023 and on noticing that the said advertisements reflect an endorsement thereof by Acharya Ramdev, it is deemed appropriate to issue notice to show cause as to why contempt of court proceedings be not initiated against him in view of the fact that this court is of the prima facie opinion that he has also violated the provisions of section 3 and 4 of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act'," it said.

The top court is hearing a plea of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) alleging a smear campaign by Ramdev against the Covid vaccination drive and modern system of medicine. *—PTI*

Supreme Court on Tuesday directed yoga guru Ramdev and Managing Director Acharya Balkrishna to appear before it *PHOTO: PTI*

KRISHNA JANMABHOOMI CASE

SC refrains from interfering with clubbing of 15 suits in temple row

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Supreme Court on Tuesday disposed of Idgah Committee plea challenging Allahabad High Court decision to consolidate 15 suits concerning the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute.

A bench led by Justice Sanjiv Khanna observed that an application to recall the order under challenge is pending before the High Court.

Committee of Management Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah has challenged Allahabad High Court decision to consolidate fifteen suits concerning the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute.

Allahabad High Court on 11 January, 2024, directed to consolidate fifteen suits concerning the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute.

In the plea, Idgah Committee said that 15 different suits have been hurriedly consolidated without a proper hearing and the HC's order deserves to be set aside as the suits have been filed by different parties with competing claims against one another and seeking different reliefs and as such, the consolidation of these suits is bound to lead to severe miscarriage of justice.

The various matters relating to Mathura's Krishna Janambhoomi land dispute are being dealt with different legal forums.Ranjana Agnihotri, a resident of Lucknow, had filed a suit in Mathura court demanding the ownership of 13.37 acres of land by Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi.

The suit filed in the Mathura court sought the removal of a mosque said to have been built premises of Katra Keshav Dev temple, near birthplace of Lord Krishna. *—ANI*

Committee of Shahi Masjid Idgah has challenged Allahabad High Court decision in Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute *PHOTO:PTI*

NAVY'S REMOTELY PILOTED CRAFT CRASHES IN KOCHI

KOCHI, 19 MARCH

A Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) or Searcher of Indian Navy crashed during a routine training sortie at INS Garuda in Kochi on Monday.

The RPA crashed at about 5pm, about one mile short of the runway.

No injuries or damage to property has been reported in the incident. "At about 5pm on 18 March, one Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA)/ Searcher, during a routine training sortie at INS Garuda, Kochi, crashed about one mile short of the runway,"

Indian Navy said. Responding swiftly, a specialist team was dispatched to the site to ensure the crashed RPA was rendered safe, the Indian Navy said in a statement.

An inquiry to investigate the incident has been ordered, the Navy added.

Further information is awaited. *—ANI*

UP elderly couple dies after house set on fire

PRAYAGRAJ, 19 MARCH

An elderly couple died after their house was set on fire during a fight with the parents of their daughter-in-law who had allegedly hanged herself, police said on Tuesday.

Three more people, including the woman's husband, were injured in the fire. The house was set ablaze when police personnel had already reached the spot after receiving information about the alleged suicide and the fight.

According to the police, the 27-year-old woman allegedly ended her life late on Monday night at her in-laws' house in the Muthiganj police station area.

Upon receiving the news, her parents and other family members gathered at the spot and got into a fight with the woman's in-laws, alleging that she was killed and then hanged, Deputy Commissioner of Police (City) Deepak Bhukar said.During the fight, some people, reportedly belonging to the woman's family, set the house of her in-laws ablaze. Police rescued five people from the house and informed the fire brigade which brought the blaze under control. While searching the burnt house around 3am, the bodies of the woman's father-in-law Rajendra Kesarwani, 65, and mother-in-law Shobha Devi, 62, were found, SHO of Muthiganj police station Sunil Bajpayee said. *—PTI*

Ex-cop gets lifer in 2006 fake encounter case

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday convicted and sentenced former policeman Pradeep Sharma to life imprisonment in connection with the fake encounter of Ramnarayan Gupta, an alleged close aide of gangster Chhota Rajan in 2006, in Mumbai.

A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Gauri Godse quashed the sessions court's 2013 judgment acquitting Sharma, terming it as "perverse" and "unsustainable".

"The trial court had overlooked the overwhelming evidence available against Sharma. The common chain of evidence unerringly proves his involvement in the case," the court said.

The bench directed Sharma to surrender before the concerned sessions court in three weeks.

The High Court also upheld the conviction and life sentence imposed by the trial court on 13 people, including policemen, and quashed the conviction and life sentence of six other accused and acquitted them.

22 people, including 13 policemen, were charged for the murder.While the accused filed appeals in the high court challenging their conviction, the prosecution and the deceased's brother Ramprasad Gupta filed an appeal against Sharma's acquittal.

Special public prosecutor Rajiv Chavan had argued that in the present case, officers who were custodians of law and order were themselves involved in a stage-managed cold-blooded murder.

The prosecution seeking Sharma's conviction in the case had argued that the former policeman was the main conspirator and chief of the entire operation of abduction and murder.

PHOTO: FB

- On 11 November, 2006, a police team picked up Gupta alias Lakkhan Bhaiya, from neighbouring Vashi on the suspicion that he was a member of the Rajan gang

On 11 November, 2006, a police team picked up Gupta alias Lakkhan Bhaiya, from neighbouring Vashi on the suspicion that he was a member of the Rajan gang, along with his friend Anil Bheda, and killed Gupta in a "fake" encounter near Nana Nani Park in suburban Versova the same evening. *—PTI*

HAL set to deliver first LCA Mark-1A fighter to IAF

New Delhi, 19 March

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is working towards delivering the first LCA Mark-1A fighter jet to the Indian Air Force by the end of this month. The state-owned public sector unit is also working towards the delivery of the first twin-seater trainer version aircraft to the IAF at the earliest, defence sources told ANI.The work is on towards meeting the delivery by 31 March and this would be a big boost for the indigenous aircraft project where an advanced aircraft would be provided to the IAF, they said. *—ANI*

Medical student raped by senior in Gujarat hospital

VADODARA, 19 MARCH

A senior medical student was arrested for allegedly raping a junior at Vadodara Gotri Hospital, police said.

A final-year medical student took a second-year student to the roof of the hospital and allegedly raped her.

Both the student and the accused came to know each other while doing an internship at the same medical college.

They later became friends with each other. After some time, a rift happened between both of them, according to the police.

The accused was threatening the victim, telling her that he had the recording of her phone calls. The victim called on the pretext of deleting the recording, and the accused took her to the roof of the hospital, where she was raped, said the police.

The student went to the police the next day, lodged a complaint and police have arrested the accused. More details on the matter are awaited. Further investigation is underway. *—ANI*

PHOTO: ANI

- The accused threatened the victim, telling her that he had the recording of her phone calls. The victim called on the pretext of deleting the recording and the accused raped her

'PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS'

US Senator expresses concern over CAA

WASHINGTON, 19 MARCH

A powerful American senator has expressed concern over the Indian government notifying rules for the implementation of the CAA, saying that as the US-India relationship deepens, it is important that the cooperation is based on shared values of protecting human rights of all, regardless of religion.

The government also came out with a press statement to say that Indian Muslims need not worry as the CAA will not impact their citizenship and has nothing to do with the community, which enjoys equal rights as Hindus.

"I am deeply concerned by the Indian government's decision to notify its controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, particularly the law's potential ramifications on India's Muslim community. Making matters worse is the fact that it is being pushed during the holy month of Ramzan," Senator Ben Cardin, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said in a statement.

Last week, the US State Department expressed concern over the notifying of the CAA and said that respect for religious freedom and equal treatment under the law for all communities are fundamental democratic principles.

India had sharply rebuked the US State Department for its criticism of the CAA and said it is "misinformed and unwarranted."

In separate statements, the Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective (HinduPACT) and the Global Hindu Heritage Foundation supported the CAA.

The legislation provides expedited citizenship to persecuted Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi minorities from India's neighbouring countries. It underscores India's dedication to safeguarding individuals and families against religious persecution, resonating with global humanitarian principles, they said.Deepti Mahajan, co-convenor of HinduPACT, said it is shocking to see the lack of empathy towards the plight of little girls from Hindu, Sikh and Christian minority communities in Pakistan. *—PTI*

American senator Ben Cardin has expressed concern over the Indian government notifying rules for the implementation of the CAA *PHOTO: ANI*

FLOUR FIGHT IN ATHENS

Revelers participate in the flour war, a unique colorful flour fight marking the end of the carnival season, in the port town of Galaxidi. The flour fight takes place on Clean Monday, the beginning of the 40-day Christian Lent fast that ends on Easter
PHOTO:PTI

How big is India's 2024 Lok Sabha election?

India, the world's largest democracy, has kicked off its two and a half month long parliamentary election to decide who will rule the South Asian nation.

On Saturday, Election Commission of India – the country's independent poll-conducting body – announced the dates for a democratic exercise that is unmatched in scale globally, and in history.

82 days, seven phases

The election process that started on Saturday will continue for 82 days until results are announced on 4 June. With the announcement of the schedule, a model code of conduct also kicks in – campaign rules now apply, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is not supposed to announce new policies that could influence voters.

The primary reason for the multiphase election is for the deployment of huge federal security forces required to check everything from polling-related violence or attempts at rigging, according to N Gopalaswami, the former chief election commissioner of India.

968 million people will take part in the election procedure. They will cast their vote through 5.5 million EVM's at 1.06 million polling station
PHOTO:FACEBOOK/ ELECTION COMMISION OF INDIA

969 million voters

The size of India's electorate is more than the population of all the countries of Europe combined.

They will cast their votes through 5.5 million electronic voting machines at 1.05 million polling stations, of which some are located in the snow-clad mountains in the Himalayas, the deserts of Rajasthan and sparsely populated islands in the Indian Ocean.

The Election Commission will deploy about 15 million polling staff and security personnel to conduct the elections. They will trek across glaciers and deserts, ride elephants and camels, and travel by boats and helicopters to ensure every voter can cast their ballot.

A $14.4bn election bill

It is expected to be the world's most expensive election. Spending by political parties and candidates to woo voters will likely cost more than 1.2 trillion rupees ($14.4bn), said Rao, whose organisation regularly estimates the country's poll expenditure.

That would be twice what was spent in India's 2019 elections – 600 billion rupees ($7.2bn). The total spending on the US presidential and congressional races in 2020 was also $14.4bn.

Polling booth at 15,256 feet

Holding elections in the world's seventh largest nation by area is a complex task.

In 2019, election workers travelled 300 miles (482 km) over four days across winding mountain roads and river valleys to set up a polling booth for one voter in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China.

Election officials also set up a voting booth at 15,256 feet (4,650 metres) in a village in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, making it the highest polling station in the world. Far off the country's east coast, on the remote Andaman and Nicobar Islands, workers travelled through crocodile-infested mangrove swamps and dense jungles to reach polling booths.

2,660 parties

A multiparty democracy, India has about 2,660 registered political parties. Parties competing in elections each get symbols – like the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's lotus, the opposition Congress party's hand, and others, ranging from an elephant to a bicycle, and a comb to an arrow. These to help voters easily identify candidates, in a country where almost a quarter of the population is not literate.

303 against 52

The principal protagonists of the 2024 battle are Prime Minister Modi and his BJP, who lead a coalition of more than three dozen parties; and the main opposition Congress party-led alliance of about two dozen parties.

Currently, BJP is in pole position following recent state victories and is expected to win a majority, according to opinion polls. BJP alone controls 12 of India's 28 states, while the Congress governs in three states.

370 or 404?

Modi has set a target of 370 seats for the BJP, 67 more than in 2019; and for its alliance to cross 400 seats. He is seeking a third term in office.

The last time any party crossed 370 seats was in the 1984 election. Congress party won 414 seats following the assassination of the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

If Modi wins and completes five years, he will be the third longest serving prime minister in Indian history.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru ruled for about 16 years and 9 months, while his daughter Indira Gandhi governed for a total of about 15 years and 11 months.

—Al Jazeera

SALAR سالار بنگلور

Rising dengue is costing India and Sri Lanka billions

The increasing incdence of dengue in India and Sri Lanka is not just a significant health concern but also exacts a hefty economic toll on these South Asian countries, say experts who estimate the annual losses to be in billions.

Researchers highlight the dire economic consequences of this affliction caused by a virus spread through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito species, reinforcing the benefits that the region would realise if the neglected tropical disease was substantially controlled.

As the sweltering heat swept across Colombo in June, Seetha, a 60-year-old daily wager found herself in the grips of dengue hemorrhagic fever, a severe and sometimes fatal form of the disease.

Seetha's work involved providing care to a 5-year-old child until the mother returned from work. The onset of dengue, however, disrupted her livelihood.

"I was bedridden for seven days in the hospital, unable to move, and the impact on my work was severe. It took me almost a month to recover," she recalls.

As the sole breadwinner following her husband's death, Seetha faced a financial quandary during her illness.

Seetha's narrative underscores the broader economic challenges faced by South Asian countries that grapple with the relentless onslaught of dengue every year.

In 2023, India officially recorded nearly 95,000 cases and 91 deaths by September 17. In 2022, the figure was 2.33 lakh with 303 deaths.

Sri Lanka had reported more than 80,000 dengue cases by the first week of December last year and 47 deaths, according to the National Dengue Control Unit (NDCU).

Dr Nayani P Weeerasinghe, a consultant microbiologist and senior lecturer at the University of Ruhuna in Galle, Sri Lanka, noted the economic burden of dengue in the two countries is substantial, with significant strains on healthcare systems and families, especially those reliant on daily wages.

Echoing Weerasinghe, epidemiologist and economist Ramanan Laxminarayan noted that although dengue rarely kills, it causes significant health burdens and costs.

Most people with dengue have mild or no symptoms and get better in up to two weeks. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache, muscle and joint pains, swollen glands, and rash.

However, severe symptoms such as shooting abdominal pain, bleeding gums or nose, and blood in vomit or stool, often come after the fever has gone, and can be fatal. What makes matters worse is that there are no effective drugs to treat the disease.

The economic impact of dengue is multifaceted.

A cost analysis study in southern Sri Lanka estimated direct medical costs per hospitalised dengue patient at USD 233.76 (around Rs 20,000) in 2017-18. For complications requiring intensive care arise, the cost soars to USD 733.46 (over Rs 61,000).

The burden extends beyond direct medical expenses to indirect costs, with households bearing 77.29 per cent of the monthly income on average, the expert said.

Weeerasinghe also highlighted variations across South Asian countries, citing a systemic analysis in India which indicates a cost of USD 5.71 billion from 2013 to 2016, substantially higher than in Sri Lanka.

A considerable proportion of families in the South Asian region have only one member working. An average of 22 days of absenteeism from work has been reported due to dengue in the countries here, according to a 2019 study published in the journal International Journal of Infectious Diseases.

In Thailand, another South Asian country with high dengue prevalence, the economic impact of the disease is 600 million Baht (over Rs 138 crore) per year for just treatment, noted Darin Areechokchai, from the Bureau of Vector-Borne Diseases, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health.

Weerasinghe warned of long-term consequences of dengue, especially in the case of pediatric infections leading to school absenteeism, potentially impacting future earnings.

To reduce the economic impact of dengue, experts say it is necessary to control the number of such cases, educate the general public, and implement policies for disease control.

International collaboration is deemed crucial for sharing knowledge and resources to address the economic burden effectively.

For instance, the US, Australia, and even countries in Southeast Asian regions like Singapore have used Aedes mosquitoes with Wolbachia bacteria to successfully reduce the number of mosquitoes in regions with dengue epidemics.

—PTI

In 2023, India officially recorded 95,000 cases and 91 deaths by September
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

Why are environmental issues not winning votes in India?

The poisonous air is shortening lives across India, Bengaluru is grappling with a severe water crisis, while Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh are yet to fully recover from the devastating glacial lake outburst and flash floods last year.

Despite this, these issues remain secondary to livelihood concerns and are yet to hold significant sway in national elections, experts say.

One reason for this, they say, is that political and social movements in India predominantly focus on livelihood issues.

Tikender Singh Panwar, former deputy mayor of Shimla, said that the lack of social mobilisation linking the environment with livelihoods is a major obstacle.

He praised Kerala's approach to risk-informed climate development but noted the challenges in states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand due to the absence of such movements connecting disasters with livelihood and governance issues.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) member said it would take another five to 10 years for environmental issues to become mainstream in the country.

"You can see what Sonam (Wangchuk) is doing in Ladakh. Even in Delhi, when it is air pollution, you find some noises being made. But these are just on the periphery," Panwar said.

Wangchuk is leading a "climate fast" to demand tribal area status for Ladakh, which he says will help protect the fragile ecology and tribal identity of the region.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Risks Report 2024 counts extreme weather events and critical change to earth systems as the greatest concerns facing the world over the next decade.

A survey conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC) and Centre for Voting Opinion and Trends in Election Research (CVoter) in 2021-2022 showed that 84 per cent Indians believe that climate change is real and most of them acknowledge that it stems from anthropogenic activities.

Several smaller political parties have also prioritised climate change in their manifestos for previous elections, focusing on issues such as sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and promoting renewable energy.

"Still, not many would vote on these issues in elections,"

Majority of the cities are grappling with severe polution
PHOTO: ANI

says Debadityo Sinha, a senior resident fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy in Delhi.

"Environmental concerns will gain prominence in elections only after we address fundamental human needs. Food, water and health take precedence. The majority of the population, busy earning a livelihood, tends to overlook environmental issues until these directly impact their daily lives," he said.

However, in states with a higher per capita income, there tends to be greater political awareness among people regarding environmental issues. In these states, political parties are expected to prioritise concerns, such as reversing environmental degradation, safeguarding forests and water resources and combating air pollution and climate change, Sinha said.

Renowned environmentalist Sunita Narain said while air pollution features prominently on the political agenda for

- Understanding the personal effects of environmental decisions becomes crucial for both elected officials and voters to face the threats from climate change and pollution

cities, especially in heavily-polluted urban centres like Delhi, the inclusion of environmental concerns in party manifestos does not necessarily translate into effective action at a significant scale.

"Cooperative efforts are essential, but finger-pointing between central and state governments, as well as among different states within a region, is counterproductive. For instance, if Delhi faces environmental challenges, so do Punjab and Haryana," she said.

To address these issues effectively, all the stakeholders must come together at a common table for meaningful discussions. Unfortunately, the current fractured and polarised political landscape makes such cooperation increasingly difficult, Narain, the director general of independent think tank Centre for Science and Environment, said.

In 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress included forest conservation and air pollution in their election manifestos for the first time. However, promises like the BJP's "green bonus" for Himalayan states remain unfulfilled.

The Congress recognised air pollution as a national public health emergency and pledged to strengthen the National Clean Air Programme.

Yet, despite these inclusions, environmental concerns continue to be overshadowed by populist issues, such as free water and power, during elections.

Aarti Khosla, founder of Climate Trends, a Delhi-based policy outreach organisation, said it is important to simplify complex environmental topics to demonstrate their impact on daily life.

There is an urgent need for policymakers and researchers to collaborate in addressing environmental challenges for the country's well-being. With India facing threats from climate change and air pollution, understanding the personal effects of environmental decisions becomes crucial for both elected officials and voters, she said.

—PTI

Vinay Kumar is the new Indian envoy to Russia

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Vinay Kumar, presently Ambassador of India to Myanmar, has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to the Russian Federation, informed the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). He is expected to take up the assignment shortly, the MEA also said.

Russia, which recently underwent elections, has been a longstanding and time-tested partner for India. The development of India-Russia relations has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wished Vladimir Putin for a huge victory in the 2024 polls. ***—ANI***

Article 23: Hong Kong passes tough security law

BANGKOK, 19 MARCH

Hong Kong has passed a tough security law which authorities say is necessary for stability, but which critics fear will further erode civil liberties. Article 23 targets new offences like external interference and insurrection, and penalties include life sentences. It was fast-tracked through its final stage by the city's pro-Beijing parliament in less than two weeks. Article 23 expands on a controversial national security law (NSL) earlier imposed by China. That law already criminalises secession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces in Hong Kong. But Hong Kong's leader John Lee has said Article 23 is also necessary to guard against "potential sabotage and undercurrents that try to create troubles", particularly "ideas of an independent Hong Kong". He hailed its passing as "a historic moment Hong Kong people have been waiting for over 26 years". ***—BBC News***

5.4 magnitude earthquake hits Pak's Balochistan

KARACHI, 19 MARCH

A 5.4-magnitude moderate earthquake struck Pakistan's Balochistan province on Tuesday and there were no immediate reports of any causalities, authorities said. "The quake's epicentre was 150 kilometres Northwest of Quetta with a depth of 35 km," a met official said. According to details, the earthquake jolts were felt in the capital city of Quetta, Noshki, Chagi, Chaman, Qilla Abdullah, Dalbadin, Pishin and some other areas of the province. The Pakistan Met Office said the earthquake tremors were also felt and recorded at the Pakistan-Iran border areas. However, officials did not report any casualties from any area where the quake jolts were felt but the Balochistan province in the past has been hit by several strong earthquakes resulting in loss of lives, injuries and huge damage to buildings and houses. An earthquake in October 2021 in the Harnai area of Balochistan killed 40 people injured 300 others and caused widespread damage in the remote area. ***—PTI***

Israel kills Hamas internal security officer in hospital battle

More than 80 people have been detained from al-Shifa Hospital

TEL AVIV, 19 MARCH

During fighting with Hamas terrorists inside a Gaza hospital compound, Israeli soldiers killed a senior Hamas figure and arrested at least 80 other terrorists there, the Israel Defence Forces said on Monday.

The Hamas figure killed during the raid was identified as Faiq Mabhuoch, head of the Operations Directorate of Hamas's Internal Security. Mabhuoh was also responsible for coordinating Hamas terror activities in the Gaza Strip. Faiq Mabhouh was eliminated in an encounter with the troops while armed and hiding in a compound at the Shifa hospital, from which he oversaw terror activity. Numerous weapons were located in the room adjacent to where he was eliminated.

Mabouh's brother, Mahmoud, procured weapons for Hamas before he was assassinated in Dubai in 2010. The assassination was widely attributed to the Mossad, Israel's intelligence service. Israeli troops raided Shifa, Gaza's largest hospital, the predawn hours, after receiving intelligence that senior Hamas figures were inside the compound planning attacks. Hamas terrorists fired from inside medical center as the forces arrived.

One soldier was killed, identified as Sgt Matan Vinogradov, 20.

Footage released by the military showed Hamas gunmen shooting from the hospital compound, as well as a roadside bomb exploding by an Israeli armored vehicle.

The IDF added that at least 80 terrorists were arrested, and that there were no indications of hostages inside the facility. ***—ANI***

A woman checks the family house of Palestinian assailant Islam Abu Humaid after it was demolished by Israeli forces, in El Amari refugee camp in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Thursday ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Faiq Mabhouh was eliminated in an encounter with the troops while armed and hiding in a compound at the Shifa hospital, from which he oversaw terror activity

Al Jazeera reporter was 'stripped, held for 12 hours'

Gaza, 19 March

Al Jazeera Arabic correspondent Ismail al-Ghoul has been released after being arrested for 12 hours and severely beaten by Israeli forces al-Shifa Hospital. Al-Ghoul was there early on Monday with his crew and other reporters to cover the Israeli army's fourth raid into the hospital, where thousands of civilians are trapped, including medical staff, patients and displaced families. Witnesses said reporter was dragged away by forces, who also destroyed broadcasting vehicles of news crews at medical facility. He has since been freed after 12 hours in Israeli custody. ***—Al Jazeera***

'JEWS WHO VOTE FOR DEMOCRATS HATE ISRAEL'

NEW YORK, 19 MARCH

Former president Donald Trump on Monday charged that Jews who vote for Democrats "hate Israel" and hate "their religion," igniting a firestorm of criticism from the White House and Jewish leaders. Trump, in an interview, had been asked about Democrats' growing criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his handling of the war in Gaza as the civilian death toll continues to mount.

"I actually think they hate Israel," Trump responded to his former aide, Sebastian Gorka. Trump, who last week became the Republican Party's presumptive nominee, went on to charge: "Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion. They hate everything about Israel and they should be ashamed of themselves because Israel will be destroyed."

The comments sparked immediate backlash from the White House, President Joe Biden's campaign and Jewish leaders. The vast majority of Jewish Americans identify as Democrats, but Trump has often accused them of disloyalty, perpetuating what critics say is an antisemitic trope. ***—AP***

TRUMP UNABLE TO GET $46B BOND IN NY FRAUD CASE

Donald Trump ***PHOTO: PTI***

WASHINGTON, 19 MARCH

Former US president Donald Trump cannot find a private company to guarantee the $464m (£365m) he has been ordered to pay in a New York civil fraud case.

The former president must either pay the full amount in cash or secure a bond in order to continue his appeal. If he is unable to do so by 25 March, he faces the prospect of some of his real estate assets being seized by the state's attorney general. Trump said that securing a bond of that size was "practically impossible".

For a fee, a bonding company would guarantee the full amount to the New York court. They would then have to pay it if Trump loses his appeal and cannot do so himself. In his statement, Trump said that the bond he was asked to pay would be "impossible for any company, including one as successful as mine".

But they concluded that "very few bonding companies will consider a bond of anything approaching that magnitude". To secure a bond, an individual has to demonstrate to the company providing the guarantee that they have enough liquidity - usually in the form of cash plus things like stocks or securities which can be sold quickly - to cover the amount. ***—BBC News***

'Kim supervises drill that targets Seoul'

SEOUL, 19 MARCH

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a live-fire drill of nuclear-capable "super-large" multiple rocket launchers designed to target South Korea's capital as he vowed to boost his war deterrent in the face of deepening confrontations with rivals, state media said Tuesday.

The report came a day after South Korea and Japan said they detected North Korea firing multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward waters off its eastern coast, adding to a streak of weapons displays that have raised regional tensions.

Experts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundaries between artillery systems and ballistic missiles because they can create their own thrust and are guided during delivery.

The North has described some of these systems, including the 600mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads.

Photos published by the North's official Korean Central News Agency showed at least six rockets being fired simultaneously from launch vehicles and flames and smoke blanketing what appeared to be a small island target. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Tuesday that it assesses North Korea conducted more launches than what was shown on the photos. ***—AP***

PUNJAB GOVT MEETINGS

Nawaz Sharif sparks controversy

LAHORE, 19 MARCH

Nawaz Sharif, the supreme leader of the PML-N, who has stayed away from public view since last month's general elections, has made a conspicuous appearance by chairing three administrative meetings of the Punjab government, raising many eyebrows as he does not hold any official position in either the provincial or federal government.

The three-time former premier on Monday chaired administrative meetings of the Punjab government led by his daughter Maryam Nawaz, the Dawn newspaper reported.

An official handout issued after the meeting said the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party supremo issued directions to ministers and officials regarding different infrastructure projects, including the underground train and metro bus, farmers' plight, electric bikes for students and Ramzan relief package.

But the 74-year-old veteran leader chairing the meetings raised many questions since he holds no official position in either the provincial or federal government and is officially only a National Assembly member. ***—PTI***

The three-time former premier on Monday chaired administrative meetings of the Punjab government ***PHOTO: PTI***

ASEEFA BHUTTO ENTERS POLITICS, FILES NOMINATION

ISLAMABAD, 19 MARCH

Aseefa Bhutto, the youngest daughter of Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari and slain premier Benazir Bhutto, has taken a plunge into the country's tumultuous politics by filing her candidacy for the bye-poll at a National Assembly seat in Sindh Province vacated by her father.

Aseefa, 31, has been active in politics for some time but was kept away from parliamentary politics by her father Zardari, also the co-chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party, until an opportune time.

Following her father's inauguration as the 14th President of Pakistan, Aseefa is poised to become the First Lady, a position traditionally held by the spouse of the president. Aseefa submitted nomination papers on Sunday in the bye-election for the NA-207 constituency of Shaheed Benzirabad district in the Sindh province.

Her father and president, Asif Ali Zardari, won the seat but vacated it after becoming president. Aseefa has a resemblance to her mother, who was killed in a bombing and suicide attack in 2007 in Rawalpindi. Aseefa was then a teenager and suffered more emotionally as compared to her two elder siblings, Bakhtawar and Bilawal. ***—PTI***

- Aseefa has been active in politics for some time but was kept away from parliamentary politics by her father Zardari, also the co-chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party, until an opportune time

US-Philippines alliance is 'ironclad', says Blinken

WASHINGTON, 19 MARCH

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has assured the Philippines, a key Washington ally, of US support amid heightened tensions with China.

He reiterated America's "ironclad" security commitments to the Philippines during a visit to Manila on Tuesday. Friction has grown between Manila and Beijing in recent months over competing claims in the South China Sea.

"They're also critical to the interests of the region, the United States and the world," US President Joe Biden said, speaking at a joint press conference with Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo. "That's why we stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defence commitments, including under the mutual defence treaty." Blinken will also discuss trade with Filipino officials, a senior State Department official has said.

The visit is also likely to be seen as bolstering American support for Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos Jr who has tilted towards Washington, unlike his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, who pushed ties with Beijing. —BBC News

Antony Blinken ***PHOTO: PTI***

US to host trilateral summit with Philippines, Japan

WASHINGTON, 19 MARCH

Leaders of the US, Japan and the Philippines will meet here on 11 April for their first-ever trilateral summit, during which they will discuss cooperation to promote inclusive economic growth and emerging technologies and further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region amidst China's aggressive actions.

US President Joe Biden will host his Filipino counterpart Ferdinand R Marcos Jr and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan at the White House for the maiden trilateral summit, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Monday. ***—PTI***

Afghan Taliban targets Pakistan's military posts

KABUL, 19 MARCH

In response to Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan, the Taliban's forces have targeted Pakistan's military posts along the Durand Line with heavy weapons, the Afghanistan-based Khaama Press reported, citing the Taliban-led Ministry of Defence.

In a press release, the Taliban-led Ministry of Defence stated, "In response to this aggression, the border forces of Taliban targeted Pakistani military centres along the fabricated border line with heavy weapons."

It further said that Afghanistan's "defence and security forces are ready to respond to any aggressive actions and will defend their territorial integrity under all circumstances."

Residents of Dand Patan had evacuated their homes after the rocket fire from Pakistan.

The clashes erupted between the armed forces of the Taliban and Pakistan after Pakistani air forces conducted airstrikes in Afghanistan's Khost and Paktika provinces.

According to the Taliban-led Ministry of Defence, Pakistani fighter jets "once again entered Afghan territory in a provocative action... and bombed civilian homes in Bermel district of Paktika province and Sepera district of Khost province," Khaama Press reported. ***—ANI***

POLITICAL TURMOIL

Haitinans see no end to spiralling violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 19 MARCH

Residents of Petionville, a wealthier area of of the city, are shaken after their most violent day so far in the country's spiralling security crisis.

More than a dozen bullet-ridden bodies lay in the street - the victims of the latest gang rampage. As well as the early morning killing spree, the home of a judge was also attacked - a clear message to the country's elites vying for power. All this in what is supposedly the safe part of town.

Unicef's executive director, Catherine Russell, has called the situation in Haiti "horrific" and likened the lawlessness to the post-apocalyptic film, Mad Max. Certainly the latest violence in Port-au-Prince is a reminder, if any were needed, that Haiti remains closer to anarchy than stability.

In that malaise, the UN has also estimated, because of the closure of so many hospitals in the capital, some 3,000 pregnant women were at risk of having to give birth with no maternity care. The first cries of Baby Woodley, just a day old, were the same as those of children born anywhere: for food and for comfort.

But as most children born there, she will grow up to find that such essentials are far from guaranteed in Haiti. Lying in an adjacent bed, Markinson Joseph was recovering from giving birth two days ago to a baby boy. Through an interpreter, she told me that she would get her baby out of the country altogether if she got the chance. ***—BBC News***

Violence has engulfed the streets of Port-au-Prince ***PHOTO: BBC***

Gunmen abduct 87 in Nigeria, escalating wave of violence

ABUJA, 19 MARCH

Gunmen have once again struck in Nigeria, abducting a staggering 87 persons in a brazen attack, as reported by residents and law enforcement officials, Al Jazeera reported.

This incident follows closely on the heels of a previous assault in which an armed gang seized 286 students and staff from a school earlier this month.

The latest attack unfolded in the Kajuru area of Kaduna State, with the victims including women and children, according to officials who spoke on Monday.

Bandits, known for their routine looting of villages and perpetration of mass kidnappings for ransom, have plunged northwest and north-central Nigeria into a state of turmoil, displacing approximately one million people, as noted by the United Nations, according to Al Jazeera. Authorities have appeared powerless to stem the tide of near-daily attacks, placing immense pressure on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

- This incident follows closely on the heels of a previous assault in which an armed gang seized 286 students and staff from a school earlier this month

Kaduna police spokesperson Mansur Hassan disclosed that the Kajuru incident occurred on Sunday night, with security forces mobilized in an effort to rescue the abducted villagers. Eyewitnesses revealed that the armed assailants, donning army uniforms, infiltrated the village undetected after parking their motorbikes at a distance. Tanko Wada Sarkin, the village head, confirmed that 87 individuals were forcefully taken captive.

Aruwa Ya'u, another resident, recounted his harrowing experience of being captured and subsequently released due to his frail health. He sought treatment at a local government clinic following the ordeal. ***—ANI***

Sensex tanks 736 points, Nifty slides below 22,000

Markets fell after Japan's bank hiked rates for 1st time in 17 yrs

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Benchmark Sensex tanked 736 points while Nifty fell below the 22,000 level on Tuesday following a sell-off in index majors TCS, Infosys and RIL and weak Asian trends as Japan's central bank hiked rates for the first time in 17 years.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 736.37 points or 1.01 per cent to settle at more than a month's low of 72,012.05. As many as 23 Sensex shares declined while seven advanced. The index declined by 815.07 points or 1.12 per cent to slide below 72,000 at 71,933.35 in day trade.

The broader NSE Nifty slumped 238.25 points or 1.08 per cent to settle at a month's low of 21,817.45. As many as 41 Nifty shares closed in the red while nine ended with gains. The key indices opened on a weak note amid losses in Asian markets as the Bank of Japan hiked interest rates for the first time in 17 years. Investors were also cautious ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision this week, analysts said. Sharp losses in TCS also dragged the indices to month's lows. Tata Consultancy Services tanked over 4 per cent as its promoter Tata Sons sold around 2.3 crore shares, or 0.65 per cent of equity stake, in the IT services major through block deals. Other IT stocks Infosys, Wipro, Tech Mahindra and HCL Technologies also closed lower. IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries, Nestle, Power Grid, ITC, Tata Motors and UltraTech Cement were

PHOTO: PTI

the other major laggards. Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Titan and Bharti Airtel were the gainers. Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said, "Following the BoJ's decision to hike interest rates for the first time in 17 years, the Asian peers' mood turned sour, which pulled the Indian market to continue its recent pessimism."

The correction in the domestic market has also been triggered by concerns over premium valuations and the delay of rate cuts by the US Fed due to higher-than-expected inflation, which is evident from the upward trend in the dollar index, he added. "Nifty fell to its lowest level in over a month on 19 March," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

Analysts said investors are exercising caution as they await the upcoming US Fed meeting, seeking indications on the potential timing of a reversal in the rate cycle. Additionally, the gradual increase in crude oil prices is further dampening market sentiment. —*PTI*

Gold jumps Rs 110; silver tumbles Rs 500

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Gold price jumped Rs 110 to Rs 66,250 per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday in line with firm trends in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 66,140 per 10g in the previous trade. However, silver tumbled Rs 500 to Rs 76,500 per kg. In the previous trade, it had ended at Rs 77,000 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 66,250 per 10g, up Rs 110 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. —*PTI*

Rupee declines 12p to close at 83.02 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

CThe rupee depreciated 12 paise to 83.02 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, weighed down by a heavy selloff in domestic equities and persistent foreign capital outflows. Besides, a surging greenback against major crosses overseas also pulled down the other local currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.94 and touched the intra-day low of 83.05 and a high of 82.93. It finally settled at 83.02 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 12 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee dropped 4 paise to settle at 82.90 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.41 per cent higher at 103.66. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.29 per cent to USD 86.64 per barrel. —*PTI*

WeWork enters Chennai to open 2,000 seater office

CHENNAI, 19 MARCH

Coworking major WeWork India on Tuesday said it has entered Chennai market and has taken on lease 1.3 lakh square feet of office space in Chennai to open a new centre with a capacity of 2,000 desks. Bengaluru-based WeWork India said, it has taken on lease over 1,30,000 square feet of office space in the commercial building 'Olympia Cyberspace' developed by Olympia Group.

The new centre will be operational in June.Karan Virwani, CEO, WeWork India, said the company will be opening its first flexible workspace in Chennai, a city known for its vibrant culture, urban population, and rapidly growing business ecosystem. WeWork India now has a presence across eight cities - New Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai and Hyderabad. At present, it has 54 coworking centres with over 90,000 desks across seven cities. —*PTI*

Inox Green Energy bags Rs 40 cr wind turbine order

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

Inox Green Energy Services on Tuesday said its subsidiary I-Fox Windtechnik India Pvt Ltd has bagged an order worth Rs 39.5 crore for restoration of 33 wind turbine generators (WTGs) of 1.5MW each from NLC India. The scope of the contract comprises supplies of materials/spares and other activities for the restoration of 33 WTGs within a period of eight months, with a revenue realisation of Rs 39.5 crore (inclusive of taxes) during the contract period, a company statement said. The order is for the restoration of 33 wind turbine generators (each 1.5 MW) of NLC India's wind power plant located at Tenkasi district in Tamil Nadu, the statement added.IGESL is one of the major wind power operations and maintenance (O&M) service providers within India with a fleet size of 3.2 GW.The company is engaged in the business of providing long-term O&M services for wind projects. It is a subsidiary of Inox Wind Ltd with whom it enjoys a synergistic relationship and is a part of the INOXGFL Group. —*PTI*

India's exports may reach $450 billion, says new FIEO President

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The country's merchandise exports are expected to reach USD 450 billion by the end of this fiscal despite geo-political challenges like the Red Sea crisis, newly elected president of apex exporters body FIEO Ashwani Kumar said on Tuesday.

He said that the need of the hour is to address the Red Sea crisis challenges by ensuring the availability of marine insurance and rational increase in freight charges.

The exporting sector, particularly, MSMEs, needs easy and low-cost credit, and marketing support to further boost the country's exports, Kumar said, adding early conclusion of free trade agreements such as with the UK and Oman will also help push the outbound shipments.

"MSMEs as will play a key

Ashwani Kumar PHOTO: PTI

role in achieving the USD 1 trillion goods export target by 2030. They are the backbone of the economy and they are facing certain issues pertaining to credit. I would urge banks to come forward in extending support to these units," Kumar said.

Further, the FIEO (Federation of Indian Export Organisations) President said that the organisation is also working on exploring more opportunities for exporters in regions like Latin America and Africa.

He also said that despite issues, exports rose about 12 per cent in February to USD 41.40 billion. During April-February 2023-24, exports reached USD 395 billion.

"This was an impressive increase despite the Red Sea crisis, tight monetary stance by the developed world and falling commodity prices. This reflects the resilience of the exporting community, who have continuously been braving such odds since the Russia-Ukraine war," he said.

The main drivers of merchandise export growth in February include engineering goods, electronic goods, organic and inorganic chemicals, drugs and pharmaceuticals, and petroleum products. —*PTI*

POPULAR VEHICLES SHARES DECLINE 2% AFTER MARKET DEBUT

CHENNAI, 19 MARCH

The stock of Popular Vehicles and Services Ltd made a weak market debut on Tuesday, listing with a discount of nearly 2 per cent, from the issue price of Rs 295.

Shares of the company started the day at Rs 292, down 1 per cent from the issue price on the BSE.

Later, the stock tumbled 10.88 per cent to Rs 262.90.

On the NSE, it listed at Rs 289.20, registering a decline of 1.96 per cent.

The company commanded a market valuation of Rs 1,928.05 crore.

The Initial Public Offer (IPO) of Popular Vehicles and Services received 1.23 times subscription on the closing day of bidding on Thursday.

The IPO had a price range of Rs 280-295 a share. —PTI

RS 9,000 CRORE DEAL

Following the fall in TCS share value, the market valuation of TCS eroded Rs 45,497.45 crore to Rs 14,54,109.37 crore on the BSE PHOTO: PTI

TCS shares tank 3% after Tata Sons divests 0.65% stake

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

- Shares of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) plunged more than 3 per cent in the morning trade on Tuesday as its promoter Tata Sons sold around 2.3 crore

Shares of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) plunged more than 3 per cent in the morning trade on Tuesday as its promoter Tata Sons sold around 2.3 crore shares, or 0.65 per cent of equity stake, in the IT services major through block deals.

TCS shares tumbled 3.30 per cent to a low of Rs 4,015.65 apiece on the NSE. On the BSE, the stock plunged 3.15 per cent to Rs 4,014 per piece, emerging a major drag on the benchmark Sensex.

According to exchange data, more than 2.53 crore shares traded on the BSE in morning deals against the two-week average of around 1 lakh.

Market experts said the decline in TCS share price is mainly due to the Tata Sons stake sale.

Following the fall in TCS share value, the market valuation of India's leading software company eroded Rs 45,497.45 crore to Rs 14,54,109.37 crore on the BSE. The block deal initiated by Tata Sons was aimed to offload up to 2.34 crore shares of TCS at a floor price of Rs 4,001 per share. This floor price represented a 3.65 per cent discount from the previous day's closing price.

The deal is estimated to be valued around Rs 9,000 crore.

As of December 2023, promoters and promoter group entities hold a 72.41 per cent stake in TCS, of which 72.38 per cent shareholding is owned by Tata Sons.

The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark nosedived 622.03 points, or 0.86 per cent, to 72,126.39, while the broader Nifty slumped 209.40, or 0.95 per cent, to 21,846.30. The stock was the biggest laggard on the BSE index.

On Monday, TCS's shares settled nearly 2 per cent lower amid reports that its promoter Tata Sons is likely to sell a minority stake in the IT major.

Tata Group's stocks have been in the spotlight after a report from Spark Capital in March mentioned that Tata Sons might go public by September 2025 to meet the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) scale-based regulations. —*PTI*

SANCTITY TO E-NOTICES

Govt mulls changes in SARFAESI laws

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

To speed up the debt recovery process, the Finance Ministry has set up a panel to suggest amendments to the SARFAESI and DRT Acts, including a provision for granting legal sanctity to e-notices to debtors, sources said.

The committee headed by an Additional Secretary held several meetings, and discussions are in the advanced stage in this regard, sources told PTI.

Last month, the Finance Ministry held extensive deliberations with the top brass of banks and Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) to enhance the efficacy of DRTs for expeditious recovery of debts.

The Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) Act was enacted in 1993 to provide a legal framework for the expeditious adjudication and recovery of debts due to banks and financial institutions.

However, the efficacy of this legislation in expediting debt recovery proved to be limited. As a result, the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act 2002 was enacted to address these shortcomings and provide a more robust framework for debt recovery.

The government has undertaken several amendments to the DRT Act and the SARFAESI Act over the years.

The last changes in the law were made in 2016, when the government had moved amendments to the SARFAESI Act, and the Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) Act in Parliament to make debt recovery more effective. —*PTI*

'Nykaa has huge lead to defend its turf from conglomerates'

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

Fashion and beauty retailer Nykaa hopes to actively defend its turf amid competition from Indian conglomerates and new players, as it stacks up strongly with a huge lead and advantage of brand play, customer base and business insights, Founder and CEO Falguni Nayar has said.

Nayar told PTI in an interview that retail is a "very big segment with space for many" and added that the omnichannel beauty and fashion retailer will stay focused with offerings that are far beyond consumers' expectations so that they do not have a reason to move to competition.

The comments assume significance in the backdrop of stiff competition unfolding in India's rapidly-growing beauty ecommerce space.

Reliance Retail has launched an omnichannel beauty retail platform, Tira, raising the

Falguni Nayar PHOTO: TWITTER

competitive heat in the booming beauty and personal care marketplace that has players like Nykaa, new entrant Tata Cliq Palette, Myntra and others.

Nayar said Nykaa has helped the beauty segment grow from a "small niche category" into a "much bigger category".

"Now that the category is bigger, it is having interest from a lot of large companies and conglomerates from the country. They are all in retail... it was a natural extension for them to extend their retail presence in new areas.

Describing retail play as a very big segment, Nayar said it offers space for many.

Nykaa will stay focused and is committed to offer consumers far beyond their expectations.

Nayar started Nykaa, an online retailer of beauty products, in 2012. She took Nykaa public in November 2021, and following its blockbuster listing, she surpassed Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw to become the richest self-made Indian woman in 2022.

Nayar believes that recent instances of corporate governance lapses in some well-known startups will lead to greater scrutiny by investors (in the ecosystem), and asserted that governance agenda has to be set out very early in an entrepreneurial journey. —*PTI*

JBM BAGS RS 7K CR ORDER FOR 1,390 ELECTRIC BUSES

GURUGRAM, 19 MARCH

JBM Auto rallied 5.55% to Rs 1,979.35 after the company announced that its subsidiary, JBM Ecolife Mobility received an order worth Rs 7,500 crore for procurement, supply, operation and maintenance of 1,390 electric buses.

The auto components maker said that its subsidiary has been declared as L1 and awarded the tender as a bus operator for procurement, supply, operation and maintenance of 1,390 electric buses [approximately 65%] and the development of allied electric and civil infrastructure on gross cost contracting [GCC] under the PM-eBus Sewa Scheme. The contract from Convergence Energy Services (CESL) under PM E-bus Sewa Scheme is valued at Rs 7,500 crore and the order has to be executed within the next 12 to 18 months. —*PTI*

BHEL bags 1,600MW thermal project order from NTPC

NEW DELHI, 18 MARCH

State-owned engineering firm Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) on Tuesday said it has bagged an order for setting up 1,600 MW Singrauli Supercritical Thermal Power Plant (STPP) Stage-III from NTPC.

The plant will be set up adjacent to the existing 2,000 MW thermal power station (TPS) at Singrauli in Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh, BHEL said.

Set up by BHEL in 1982, Singrauli TPS was NTPC's first power plant in the state.

The machines installed earlier by BHEL at Singrauli have been performing exceedingly well since commissioning, it said.

According to the statement, under International Competitive Bidding (ICB), Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) has bagged an order from NTPC for setting up the 2x800 MW Singrauli

- State-owned engineering firm Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) on Tuesday said it has bagged an order for setting up 1,600 MW Singrauli Supercritical Thermal Power Plant (STPP) Stage-III from NTPC.

Supercritical Thermal Power Plant (STPP) Stage-III on Engineering, Procurement & Construction (EPC) basis. —*PTI*

DEADLINE APPROACHES

H-1B registration to close on 22 March

WASHINGTON, 19 MARCH

The initial registration period for the H-1B visas, the most sought-after by Indian IT professionals, for fiscal 2025 closes on March 22, a federal agency has said.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The initial registration period for the most sought-after H-1B visas for foreign guest workers for fiscal 2025 closes at 9:30 pm IST on 22 March, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) said on Monday.

During this period, prospective petitioners and legal representatives must use an online account of US Citizenship and Immigration Services to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the associated registration fee for each beneficiary.

Prospective petitioners and legal representatives must use an online account of US Citizenship and Immigration Services to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process PHOTO: PTI

Online account users will also be able to collaborate on registrations and petitions with enhanced organisational account features in their online accounts, it said.

Form I-129, a petition for a nonimmigrant worker, for H-1B petitions and Form I-907, a request for premium processing service, are now accessible in USCIS online accounts, a media release said.

- The initial registration period for the H-1B visas, the most sought-after by Indian IT professionals, for fiscal 2025 closes on March 22, a federal agency has said.

USCIS will begin accepting online filing of the forms for H-1B cap petitions on 1 April. "We will announce when online filing of non-cap H-1B petitions is available," USCIS said.

—PTI

KNOW YOUR TEAM

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

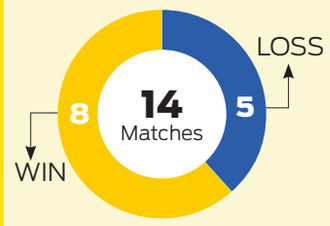
CSK carries the tag of Champions with a record of winning highest number of IPL trophies. With Dhoni's captaincy, the team again eyes a big win this year

MS DHONI
Key Batsman

26.0	32	12
Avg (Average)	HS (Highest Score)	Innings (Innings)
182.45	3	10
SR (Strike Rate)	4s (Fours)	6s (sixes)

STRENGTHS
The team has aggressive top order players like Ruturaj Gaikwad, Devon Conway, and Shivam Dube and has efficient all rounders

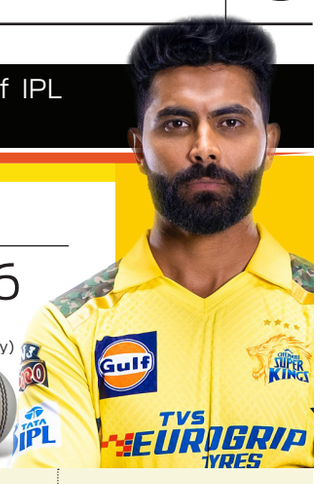
2023 IPL RECORDS



WEAKNESS
Lack of quality death bowling may be a major problem for the team, especially the absense of Pathirana might impact the team

RAVINDRA JADEJA
Key Bowler

16	20	7.56
Innngs (Innings)	Wkts (Wickets)	Eco (Economy)
10/3	0	
BBI (Best Bowling in innings)	4W (Wickets)	



SQUAD MS Dhoni(C), Rituraj Gaikwad, Devon Conway, Ajinkya Rahane,Shaik Rasheed, Sameer Rizvi, Avanish Rao Aravelly, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Prashant Solanki, Simarjit Singh, Matheesha Pathirana, Mustafizur Rahman, Mukesh Choudhary, Ravindra Jadeja, Moen Ali, Mitchell Santner, Shivam Dube, Mahesh Theekshana, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Nishant Sindhu, Ajay Mandal, Daryl Mitchel, Rachin Ravindra, Shardul Thakur

SCHEDULE

22 March vs RCB	26 March vs GT	31 March vs DC	5 April vs SRH
Chennai	Chennai	Visakhapatnam	Hyderabad

PHOTO: PTI

Big moments helped us win: Perry

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Staying calm and composed in the most high-pressure moments and peaking at the right time helped Royal Challengers Bangalore win their maiden title at the Women's Premier League (WPL), said star Australian all-rounder Ellyse Perry. RCB beat Delhi Capitals by 8 wickets in the summit clash to claim the title on Sunday. The 33-year-old Perry emerged as the star performer for RCB as she ended the tournament as the leading run-scorer with 347 and also recorded the best bowling figures in WPL history taking 6 wickets against Mumbai Indians in their last league game. We've had a great time together, franchise cricket is one of those where there is a small window in time and things have to come together for the group and the individuals," Perry, who scored a vital 35 not out in the final, told PTI in an interview.
—PTI

PHOTO: AFP

Sumit Nagal fails to qualify for Miami Open

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal failed to make the main draw of the Miami Open on debut after losing his final qualifying round match to Hong Kong's Coleman Wong here on Tuesday.Nagal lost 6-3 1-6 5-7 to the 19-year-old, squandering the advantage he secured by winning the first set.Wong, who like Nagal is playing his first Miami Open, defeated France's Hugo Gaston 6-2 3-6 6-2 in his first qualifying round.Earlier, Nagal showed great composure on their way to a straight-set win over Canada's Gabriel Diallo to make a bright start to the tournament in his maiden appearance.The 26-year-old, playing the first-round qualifier match, kept his nerves in the crucial stages to outwit the 6 feet 8 inches tall Canadian Diallo 7-6(3) 6-2 on Monday.Nagal had broken into the world's top 100 last month after winning the Chennai Open. Nagal won the tie-breaker in the first set after saving a break point.*—AP*

Australia postpones T20 series against Afghanistan

SYDNEY, 19 MARCH

Cricket Australia on Tuesday postponed a three-match T20 International home series against Afghanistan's men's team in August this year, citing the "worsening" conditions for women and girls in that country.The Taliban, following its return to power in Afghanistan, has imposed restrictions on girls attending high schools, barred women from universities and stopped female Afghan aid staff from working. CA's decision to postpone the upcoming series is the continuation of its tough stand on the South Asian country.
—AP

Bumrah needs off-season with his bowling action: McGrath

With so much extensive effort, Bumrah needs a break

CHENNAI, 19 MARCH

Jasprit Bumrah needs an 'off-season' since his bowling action with an 'extensive effort' could result in ace India pacer suffering further injuries, warned legendary Australian pacer Glenn McGrath here on Tuesday.

Bumrah spent a lengthy period on the sidelines for undergoing a surgery for stress fracture on his back in March 2023, while being already out of action since September 2022. In between, he also missed the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia as well as the IPL 2023.

The right-arm pacer, who returned to action a little earlier than anticipated to lead India in their three-match T20I tour of Ireland last August, hit the stride immediately and went on to claim 20 wickets in the 50-over World Cup.

McGrath said owing to his action and workload, Bumrah needs time off from the game given the amount of effort that goes into his bowling."The last two strides that he takes, he just powers into the crease. Thus, his momentum increases, and that's where he gets the pace," McGrath said during an interaction with the media here at the MRF Pace Foundation.

Glenn McGrath and Jasprit Bumrah PHOTO: PTI

"Someone like Bumrah needs an off-season because he puts so much into every ball. With so much extensive effort, he needs a break. If he keeps playing, the amount of pressure created given the bowling action he has, he is bound to get injured, which he has in the past," said the fast bowling great.McGrath said having a good stable of right-arm pacers has not forced India to search desperately for a left-arm bowler."

The Indian fast bowling has been set for a long time and hasn't had a big turnover.

The way (Mohammed) Shami, Bumrah, (Mohammed) Siraj, and Umesh (Yadav) have delivered, only when they move older, we can think of having a change," McGrath said."We have Avesh Khan and many others in the fray.

We will see in the future. Having so many good right-arm bowlers is the reason why we haven't seen a left-arm Indian pacer lately," he added. Meanwhile, McGrath backed Australian quicks Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, two of the costliest players in IPL auction history, to not get bogged down by the price tag.

Starc was roped in for a whopping Rs 24.75 crore by Kolkata Knight Riders whereas Cummins was bought by Hyderabad for Rs 20 crore.
—PTI

- Jasprit Bumrah needs an 'off-season' since his bowling action with an 'extensive effort' could result in ace India pacer suffering further injuries, warned legendary Australian pacer Glenn McGrath here on Tuesday.

ADVANI'S UNPARALLELED SKILL

Legendary Indian cueist Pankaj Advani PHOTO: PTI

Advani inducted into Billiards Hall of Fame

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Legendary Indian cueist Pankaj Advani achieved yet another milestone in his glorious career as he was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the World Billiards Museum in Shangrao City in China.

Last November, the 38-year-old Indian star won his 26th IBSF (the International Billiards and Snooker Federation) title after beating compatriot Sourav Kothari who had threatened his chances early on in the billiards' long-format contest.

"I am deeply honored to join the Hall of Fame at the World Billiards Museum. The love and support I've received throughout this incredible journey have been overwhelming and I'm extremely grateful for it," Advani said.

Advani's unparalleled skill, unwavering dedication, and remarkable achievements have strengthened his status as one of the greatest champions in the history of billiards.

"I am grateful to represent our country and the entire billiards community.

I'll continue working hard and dedicate myself to the sport and do my best to make everyone proud," he added.
—PTI

Sidhu returns to commentary box after a decade this IPL

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Set to be back in the commentary box after a decade with the upcoming IPL, flamboyant former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu says the glitzy league would help decide the T20 World Cup squad of not just India but also other countries.

After a decade-long stint in the unforgiving world of politics, Sidhu and his 'Sidhuisms' will be back on air starting with the IPL, which precedes the T20 World Cup in June.

"The IPL will set the tone for the World Cup. There is no other cricket happening. The eyes of the world are on IPL. This is where you can snatch a berth for the T20 World Cup, not only Indians, even the foreign players," Sidhu told PTI in an interview facilitated by the IPL's official TV broadcaster 'Star Sports'.

Navjot Singh Sidhu PHOTO: PTI

Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, who have not played a lot of T20 cricket since the 2022 edition, are expected to be on the flight to the USA and Caribbean for the ICC showpiece.

Do the veteran batters still add value to the T20 squad?

"They will be needed there. These are giants of the cricketing world. Form is like the morning dew, it can elude you but the class of these people has the stamp of authority.

"I would rate Kohli as the greatest Indian batsman for the simple reason, of his fitness, he is getting fitter with age like old wine does. Technically very sound and he has the uncanny knack of adapting to all three formats, same goes for Rohit," Sidhu explained in his inimitable style.

"Both are quality players. I am not sure about Rohit's fitness levels. With age, you tend to slow down, and your reflexes tend to go.

Sehwag with those glasses, his reflexes were not the same, I saw it in the IPL." *—PTI*

Rishabh Pant appointed Delhi Capitals captain for IPL 2024

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Rishabh Pant was on Tuesday appointed as the captain of Delhi Capitals for the upcoming edition of the IPL, marking a wonderful chapter in his miraculous comeback saga. The keeper-batter missed cricketing action for 14 months after suffering a horrific car accident in December 2022."

We are delighted to welcome Rishabh back as our captain. Grit and fearlessness have always dictated his brand of cricket, and not surprisingly, even his road to recovery.*—PTI*

Perth to host India's first Test against Australia in November: Report

MELBOURNE, 19 MARCH

Perth is set to host the opening Test of the five-match series during the much-anticipated India's tour of Australia later this year.According to a report in 'The Sydney Morning Herald', Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney have also been picked as the venues for the blockbuster series."Adelaide will host the second Test and Brisbane the third, with the Boxing Day and New Year's Tests keeping their traditional time slots in Melbourne and Sydney," the report said.The Adelaide Test will be a day-night affair.Cricket Australia is yet to come out with its schedule for the next season but a final announcement is expected by the end of this month. *—AP*

RCB Player Virat Kohli and RCB Players during the RCB Unbox program ahead of the IPL 2024 in Bengaluru PHOTO: PTI

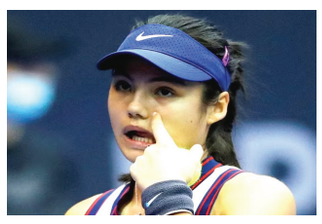
Raducanu withdraws from MO

PRAGUE, 7 MARCH

Britain's Emma Raducanu has withdrawn from the Miami Open with a lower back injury, tournament organizers said on Tuesday, the latest setback for the 21-year-old.

Raducanu spent eight months out with wrist and ankle problems last year but returned to action in January and had an encouraging performance at Indian Wells last week where she reached the third round.

The 2021 US Open winner, a wildcard entry at Miami, was scheduled to play China's Wang Xiyu in the first round on Tuesday.



Emma Raducanu PHOTO: AFP

Raducanu had surgeries on her ankle and both wrists last year.She was beaten in the Indian Wells third round by world number two Aryna Sabalenka.Wang will now face Slovakian qualifier Anna Karolina Schmiedlova.

Tuesday's action sees Romanian Simona Halep return to action after her four-year doping ban was reduced to nine months and she was cleared by the Court of Arbitration for Sport for an immediate return. —AP

Manipur qualifies for quarterfinals

PUNE, 19 MARCH

Manipur progressed to the quarterfinals with an 11-2 win over Uttarakhand in a Pool G match as the league stage of the Senior Women National Championship concluded here on Tuesday.

Karnataka also ended their campaign on a high, beating Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu Hockey 13-0 in another pool G game.
—PTI

PGA TOUR TITLE

Scheffler is reaching a dominance not seen since Woods

FLORIDA, 19 MARCH

Scottie Scheffler is next in line for comparisons with Tiger Woods because golf, like other sports, is always looking for the heir to the throne.

Scheffler is playing great golf, measured as much by his elite ball-striking and alarming consistency as the results. He now has nine victories against the strongest fields — one of them a small field in the Bahamas — in the 25 months since he won his first PGA Tour title.

Equally impressive is his 65% rate of finishing in the top 10.

"I think that's a funny question," Scheffler said Sunday evening after his record-tying final round made him the first back-to-back winner of The Players Championship.

He found out the answer a month earlier at Riviera during the Genesis Invitational.

"I'm not going to remember the exact numbers, but we're playing at Riv this year and I hit my tee ball, and this guy yells out, Congrats on being No. 1, Scottie — 11 more years to go!'" he said.

And then Scheffler repeated the number to let it sink in for anyone to listen.

Scheffler reached No. 1 in the world for the fourth time after his runner-up finish in the PGA Championship last May, and he has been there ever since, challenged a few times by either Jon Rahm or Rory McIlroy.

Scottie Scheffler speaks to the media after winning The Players Championship golf tournament PHOTO: PTI

And now with his second straight win — a five-shot victory at Bay Hill, and a five-shot comeback at the TPC Sawgrass — his lead at the top of the ranking is the largest since Dustin Johnson in May 2017. Johnson stayed No. 1 for 64 consecutive weeks, the longest in the post-Woods era. Scheffler is currently at 43 weeks. His total time has been 78 weeks.

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Woods holds the record at 281 consecutive weeks, breaking his previous mark of 264 consecutive weeks. His total time at No. 1 was slightly more than 13 years.

"Anytime you can be compared to Tiger I think is special," Scheffler said. "But I mean, the guy stands alone I think in our game. He does."

Scheffler has tied Woods with the most Players Championship titles — two.

"Outside of that, I've got 14 more majors and 70-some PGA Tour events to catch up," he said. "So I think I'm going to stick to my routine and just continue to plod along, try and stay as even-keeled as I can."

It's easy to overlook Johnson, partly because he is with LIV Golf and is seen against a full roster of great players only at the four majors, and partly because it has been seven years since he was at his most dominant. He won three straight tournaments — Riviera and two World Golf Championships — and was the overwhelming favourite at the Masters until slipping down the stairs the day before the first round and having to withdraw. Before him was McIlroy, who won seven times from May 2014 through May 2015, including consecutive majors. And then he injured his knee playing soccer, missing the British Open at St. Andrews, and lost the No. 1 ranking to Jordan Spieth. Scheffler offered a small reminder about looking too far into the future. He felt something in his neck on the second hole of his second round.
—AP